

## Special Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Two-Spirit Archives at the University of Winnipeg for displaying their exhibits at the Gathering.

Thank you to Kristine Ward and Dallas Gillingham for their legal research.

Thank you to Maya Linov for her work as a Student Assistant.

## Thank You To Our Sponsors



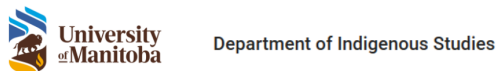
Gender & Women's Studies via the Margaret Laurence Endowment Fund

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# The Two-Spirit, Trans, and Allied Gathering: On Prisons and Conditions of Confinement

Thursday, May 7, 2026, at 8:30 AM

The University of Winnipeg

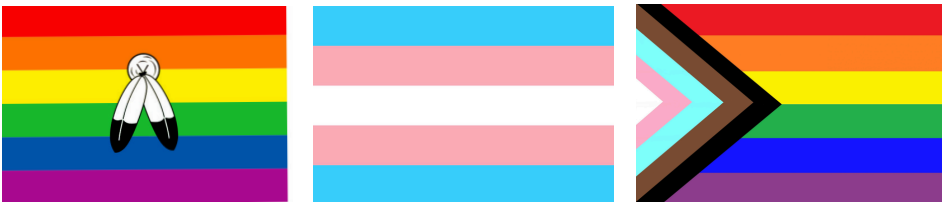
Gathering Room: 2M70

Wellness Room: 2M63

## About the Gathering

*The Two-Spirit, Trans, and Allied Gathering: On Prisons and Conditions of Confinement* is a free, public event that is taking place on May 7 at the University of Winnipeg. The gathering is intended as an educational forum and a space to build relationships.

The Gathering brings together experts—with lived experience, activists, academics, lawyers, and practitioners—to forge a national network of advocates and advance social, legal, and policy change that will benefit incarcerated 2S and trans people.



## The Organizing Team

**Leon Laidlaw** (they/he) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Gender and Women's Studies at Brandon University. Leon is a settler trans scholar who specializes in issues of justice, rights, and gender from a critical and decolonial framework. They completed their doctoral research on the topic of trans rights and legal issues in prisons and are currently drafting their book manuscript, "Confined in the Binary: Anti-Colonial and Abolitionist Approaches to Trans Prison Reform," with Fernwood Publishing.

**Natasha Stirrett** is an Associate Professor at the Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice (ICCJ). She is a member of Ermineskin Cree Nation who grew up in the Cornwall/Akwesasne area located on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee people. Her work is centered within the intersections of Indigenous Studies, Critical Criminology and Gender Studies. Her work is primarily urban Indigenous community-grounded and informed by Indigenous and decolonial approaches, prioritizing relationality and collaboration.

**Quinn Saretsky** (she/they) is the Executive Director of Nii Gaanii Asin, a pilot initiative and partnership between At the Root Consulting and the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Law providing free private "Gladue reports" and healing plan support to Indigenous people who have plead or been found guilty of criminal offences in Manitoba. Quinn is a sundancer, buffalo dancer, and supports relatives to tell their stories through cultural and spiritual learning throughout and after the sentencing process. Quinn has been volunteering and working in community with relatives who have been impacted by multiple systems since 2008. They are a member of Sagkeeng First Nation and also has ancestral ties to the Métis communities of Grand Marais and Traverse Bay.

**Adrienne Huard** (they/she) is an Anishinaabe Two-Spirit curator, writer, performer, and Lecturer at the University of Manitoba in the Indigenous Studies department. They are a registered member of Couchiching First Nation in Treaty 3 territory, and currently reside in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Additionally, Huard is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Manitoba, researching Two-Spirit, trans, and queer Indigenous aesthetics and epistemologies.

**Kevin Walby** is Professor of Criminal Justice, University of Winnipeg. He is co-author of *Police Funding, Dark Money, and the Greedy Institution* (Routledge, 2022). He is co-editor of *Disarm, Defund, Dismantle: Police Abolition in Canada* (BTL Press, 2022) as well as *Changing of the Guards: Private Influences, Privatization, and Criminal Justice in Canada* (UBC Press, 2022). He is the Director of the Centre for Access to Information and Justice (CAIJ) and co-editor of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*.

## Contributors

**Nicole Kief** is the Executive Director of Prisoners' Legal Services ("PLS"), a legal clinic for people in federal and provincial prisons in British Columbia. PLS assists people with the liberty deprivations and injustices they experience in custody, including supporting the human rights, safety and dignity of trans, Two-Spirit and other gender-non-conforming people. PLS also engages in strategic litigation and advocacy to achieve systemic, anti-carceral change. Prior to joining PLS, Nicole worked at the American Civil Liberties Union in New York and served as Interim Executive Director of the ACLU of South and North Dakota.

**Hailey Bird Matheson** (she/her) is a two spirit urban Indigenous person from Peguis First Nation on her maternal side and of Scottish and French ancestry on her paternal side. She is a fancy and jingle dress dancer, a beadwork artist, and prioritizes supporting her relatives in connecting to community, culture, and the land. Hailey is the founder of the 'Community Cuzzins' program, which offers cultural and land-based programming as life promotion for Two-Spirit and Queer Indigenous youth in the urban centre of Winnipeg. She has a BSW from UBC and MSW-1K (Masters of Social Work in Indigenous Knowledges) from the UofM. Hailey has 10 years of experience in frontline work in Vancouver and Winnipeg, primarily in harm reduction, land-based programming, crisis support and trauma therapy. She is currently practicing as a therapist, supporting primarily urban Indigenous people in Treaty One. She hosts dialogues and workshops on trauma-informed practice, harm reduction and naloxone training, and advocates for the inclusion of Indigenous voices in these spheres of practice.

**Charlotte Nolin** is an Elder in residence at Ongomiizwin - Indigenous Institute of Health and Healing at the University of Manitoba.

**Aaden Pearson** (they/them) is a Staff Lawyer and Trans Rights Legal Fellow at the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, where they develop and coordinate advocacy strategies to advance trans rights in Canada and monitor emerging legal and policy developments. Prior to joining the CCLA, Aaden held a fellowship with the Law Commission of Canada focused on national law reform. They also clerked at the Federal Court of Appeal and practiced civil and constitutional litigation at a boutique law firm. They hold J.D. and B.C.L. degrees from McGill University and a journalism degree from Concordia University.

**Maggie Smith** is a frontline harm reduction worker, community organizer and prison abolitionist based in Tiohtià:ke/Montreal. They have been a member of the Prisoner Correspondence Project organizing collective since 2017. The Prisoner Correspondence Project is a solidarity project for gay, lesbian, transsexual, transgender, gendervariant, two-spirit, intersex, bisexual and queer prisoners in Canada and the United States, linking them with people a part of these same communities outside of prison. Through a penpal program, resource library and an annual newsletter of 2SLGBTQ+ prisoner writing, the Prisoner Correspondence Project aims to strengthen networks of queer and trans solidarity between bars. The project is guided by a commitment to community support, a deep and historic suspicion of policing and surveillance, the belief that personal relationships are an integral part of consciousness building, and an unyielding dedication to sexual and gender self-determination.

**Sarah M. Steele**, PhD, (they/them) is a postdoctoral scholar for the Chair in Transgender Studies at the University of Victoria, BC with a PhD in Sociology from the University of Illinois, Chicago. Sarah's academic work, activism and research interests lie at the intersections of race, sexuality, and trans and queer politics. You can find their work published in the Archives of Sexual Behavior, Social Currents, and the Journal of Homosexuality. Sarah also spent many years building community with incarcerated LGBTQ/HIV+ folks in the United States before moving to Canada to work on The Trans+ People in Canadian Prisons Project. They enjoy urban gardening and hiking with their dog, Lucille Noodles.

## Event Program

8:30am-9:00am: Registration and Coffee

9:00am-9:30am: Welcome

- Introduction by the Organizing Committee
- Prayer & Smudge by Susie McPherson-Derendy

9:30am-10:30am: "Two-Spirit Teachings"

- Kokum Charlotte Nolin, introduced by Adrienne Huard

10:30-10:45am: Break

10:45am-11:15am: "Trans+ Prison Project: Preliminary Report"

- Sarah Steele and Aaron Devor, introduced by Leon Laidlaw

11:15am-11:20am: Short Break

11:20am-12:30pm: "Grassroots Advocacy and Abolition Conversation"

- Moka Dawkins, Maggie Smith, Hailey Bird Matheson, and Davey Cole, moderated by Adrienne Huard

12:30pm-1:30pm: Lunch Break

- Provided by Yum Yum Catering

1:30pm-2:45pm: "The State of Trans Rights, Prison Policies, and Legal Advocacy"

- Brianna Bourassa, Allison Fenske, Nicole Kief, and Aaden Pearson, moderated by Natasha Stirrett

2:45pm-3:00pm: Break

3:00pm-4:30pm: "Reclaiming My Spirit" (Keynote)

- Fallon Aubee, introduced by Leon Laidlaw

4:30-5:00pm: Closing Remarks by the Organizing Committee

## Panel & Presentation Descriptions

### **Trans+ Prison Project: Preliminary Report**

The Trans+ People in Canadian Prisons Project, funded by CSC, works to better understand the experiences of transgender, non-binary, some Two-Spirit, and other gender-diverse individuals (also called Trans+ people) within Canadian Federal Prisons. To date, we have interviewed 76 currently incarcerated prisoners, held focus groups with 50 CSC staff members, and interviewed 15 upper administrators to learn more about how current policies and procedures for Trans+ prisoners are being carried out and what challenges are arising at different levels throughout this process. This presentation will outline our research project and offer preliminary findings that speak to the current landscape for Trans+ people in Federal Prisons.

### **Grassroots Advocacy and Abolition Conversation**

This conversation brings together grassroots advocates and community members who are doing diverse work aimed at strengthening communities, working with incarcerated people, and furthering abolitionists movements. Through sharing and reflecting on their work, this conversation brings to light the different forms that grassroots advocacy and abolition may take, across different locations and positionalities.

### **The State of Trans Rights, Prison Policies, and Legal Advocacy**

This conversation features legal counsel and advocates who come together to share their experience and expertise supporting Two-Spirit and trans people who are incarcerated. The conversation engages current issues, emerging and precedent-setting cases that impact trans rights in prisons, and the recent direction of transphobic organizing movements.

### **\*Reclaiming My Spirit" (Keynote)**

My presentation will open a forum of interactive conversation as I tell you about the journey I travelled in order to become visible in a society that looked right through me and worse-made me a target of oppression from the top down. My journey is riddled with injury, unresolved loss and an experience of a modern-day Residential School that cannot be understated. It must be said: this was deliberate and calculated, and sadly it remains unabated even today. I continue to live the lifelong effects of decisions The CSC made despite the work that has been done to advance human rights for diverse peoples "behind the wire". Revealing my experience as the first in Canada to travel this journey is certain to conclude with: "This script can not be dreamed, it was created and written by The CSC, and the lifelong harm is intentional".

## Contributors

**Fallon Venessa-Lynne Aubee** is a Two-Spirit Transwoman, and a senior citizen, with a quarter century of lived experience. My training as a Prisoners' Legal Advocate led me into fighting for the Human Rights for those behind the wire. In doing so, the ability I created to become effective had concluded with some very positive outcomes and producing safer environments for incarcerated Gender-Diverse and all peoples. I also recognize that the needs of individuals are not a cookie cutter process. Aligning with the principles that if you always treat an individual according to who they were, you will never see who they can become. My work has highlighted the harm done with an understanding of what needs to improve with a map for arriving at the finish line. As I continue, I say All My Relations

**Brianna Bourassa** is a Lead Advocate with the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) and a Special Projects Manager with the Centre for Research into the Processes, Outcomes, and Impacts of Incarceration. She is also a graduate student at the University of Victoria, where her thesis examines the effectiveness of the Correctional Service of Canada's legislated grievance procedure as a mechanism for rights redress in federal penitentiaries designated for women. Both her legal advocacy and research are grounded in a commitment to policy justice and to ensuring that those most directly affected by legal and policy decisions are meaningfully included in all aspects of their development.

**Davey Francis Cole** is from Moose Deer Point First Nation but was raised on Treaty 1 territory, has been working in harm reduction for almost a decade, and they were the lead coordinator on Manitoba's first overdose prevention site. Davey is a community member, cultural worker, event organiser and party boy. They are also a two spirit performer who organises with QPOC Winnipeg, the all indigenous drag collective Bannock Babes and is an advocate for safe supply, land back and harm reduction.

**Moka Dawkins** is a Black and Indigenous trans activist, educator, and community organizer based in Toronto. Through advocacy, research, and public storytelling, she challenges systemic injustice affecting Black, trans, and marginalized communities. Her work focuses on prison reform, community care, and raising awareness about policing, discrimination, and social equity.

**SusieMcPherson-Derendy** is the Indigenous Peoples' Centre Cree Knowledge Keeper. Susie was born and raised in Churchill, Manitoba along the banks of the Churchill River. She has called Brandon Home for 38 years. Susie is a member of Brandon University's Indigenous Initiatives Committee and is also Knowledge Keeper at Assiniboine College where she sits on the Indigenous Education Advisory Circle. At BU, Susie is committed to a balanced education. She is the creator of "BU Teachings House" which is put on monthly at BU. Susie shares that there is a western worldview knowledge system and there is an Indigenous worldview knowledge system, and we would do well to learn from both.

**Aaron Devor**, PhD, FSSSS, FSTLHE, has been studying and teaching about transgender topics since the early 1980s. He is the world's first Chair in Transgender Studies, Founder and Subject Matter Expert for the world's largest Transgender Archives and the Founder and Host of the international, interdisciplinary, and intergenerational Moving Trans History Forward conferences. He has published widely on transgender topics and has delivered lectures to audiences around the world. He is an out trans man and a professor at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada.

**Allison Fenske** is Clinical Counsel at the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Law and Director of the University of Manitoba Community Law Centre – a long-standing partnership with Legal Aid Manitoba providing law students with the opportunity to represent individuals who would not otherwise receive legal aid. The UMCLC is home to Manitoba's only Prison Law Clinic. Called to the bar in 2008, Allison has appeared at all levels of court and before a variety of administrative tribunals. Her legal work has focused on defending and advancing the rights of people and communities marginalized through state and systemic oppression.