



# Transforming Together:

## A Blueprint for Queer and Trans Inclusive Practices in the Anti-Violence Sector



## Land Acknowledgement

Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre acknowledges that we have the opportunity to learn, create change, be of service and employ folks on the unceded, ancestral, and occupied lands of the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam), S<sup>k</sup>wxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. These lands were never ceded but stolen through colonial violence, which continues today.

We are deeply grateful to the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, who have been the stewards of these lands since time immemorial. We honour their resistance, resilience, and strength in the face of ongoing dispossession and colonial violence.

As we engage in the work of responding to and healing from sexual violence, we must also recognize the interconnectedness of colonialism, gendered violence, and all systems of oppression.

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# Introduction

Welcome and Overview



“Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better.”

- Maya Angelou

# Introduction

## What We Do and How We Got Here

As an organization that has been in existence for over 40 years, internal change is both inevitable and essential. Now Salal, previously WAVAW, was formed in 1983 by a small but dedicated group of volunteers who began a basement-run crisis line offering support to women who were survivors of sexualized violence. Over the years, WAVAW expanded its offerings to include a variety of programming such as [individual counselling, support circles, hospital and police accompaniment, Indigenous-specific programming, and the continued operation of a 24-hour crisis line.](#)

Like other anti-violence organizations, Salal provides essential services including immediate crisis support, mid-range counselling, and advocacy for survivors navigating medical and legal systems. What sets us apart from other organizations is our unwavering mandate focused specifically on sexualized violence, [alongside our values, and commitment to shifting society](#) through [education, outreach, and activism](#). Salal is committed to ensuring that our efforts contribute to a deeper understanding of the root causes of violence in our communities and we strive to create a future free from sexualized violence.

Salal, like many feminist organizations, has an imperfect history when it comes to trans inclusion. We share this history not to present ourselves as a model of perfection, but to offer an honest and humble account of what progress has looked like for us. In doing so, we aim to resist a dominant cultural narrative of perfection, or seamless, immediate and smooth change. By reflecting on our journey, we hope to demystify the process of shifting organizational culture, shifting the workplace and building truly inclusive services. We hope to show how this process laid the foundation for the practices outlined in this Promising Practices Blueprint.

Funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE), this project was developed to evaluate our own organization and services and create a framework that other organizations can follow in their inclusion journeys. Over the past five years, we've undergone a deep and often complex process of internal evolution. We'll walk you through the shifts we've made, the progress, and the steps—both forward and backward - that have shaped our path. While it's impossible to capture every learning along the way, we hope what we share offers insight, direction, and encouragement for others working toward inclusive, affirming services for Two-Spirit, Trans and gender diverse survivors of sexual violence.

## Overview of Salal's Inclusion Journey

**1982**

Eighteen community members came together to form a grassroots collective, then named WAVAW, with the goal of ending sexual violence.

**1984**

WAVAW formally separated from Vancouver Rape Relief. This marked the beginning of the organization's distinct trajectory in intersectional, feminist anti-violence work.

**1980–90's**

WAVAW's advocacy helped reform the Criminal Code, replacing the term "rape" with "sexual assault" and legally recognizing violence within marriage. Ongoing advocacy influenced how "consent" was understood in law—placing responsibility on the person seeking and obtaining it. WAVAW also supported rape shield laws to protect survivors from invasive questioning in court.

**1990**

WAVAW created a trans inclusion policy, explicitly affirming that both cis and trans women could safely access services. This early stance on gender inclusion stood in contrast to much of the broader feminist sector at the time.

**1995**

WAVAW stood in solidarity with [Kimberly Nixon](#), a trans woman who took Vancouver Rape Relief to court for discrimination. The case lasted over a decade; WAVAW publicly supported Nixon throughout. The organization maintains allyship with her to this day.

**2008**

WAVAW published *Stepping Out of the Binary*, a paper that conflated sex work with violence and contributed to stigma against sex workers. It disseminated harmful misinformation and increased barriers for sex workers seeking support after experiencing gender-based sexual violence.

**2017**

WAVAW's Inclusion Project began and services were expanded to all marginalized genders. Supported by the Department of Justice, this project laid the foundation for WAVAW's continued inclusion journey.

**2018**

Since 2008, internal efforts have worked to shift lateral violence against sex workers. This ongoing work was publicly acknowledged in WAVAW's [apology](#), issued after community feedback from the Inclusion Project. Today, Salal supports full decriminalization of sex work and opposes the Nordic model.

**2019**

WAVAW was honoured as [Grand Marshal of the Vancouver Dyke March](#) for its leadership in addressing transmisogyny and exclusionary feminist politics. This moment reflected public recognition of the organization's evolving commitment to inclusion and trans liberation.

**2020–2021**

With funding from the Vancouver Foundation and WAGE, WAVAW launched the Reimagining Justice Project, which piloted transformative justice models as alternatives to the traditional carceral system. The project also brought together a national coalition of organizations also exploring alternatives to carceral responses to sexual violence.

**2020–2025**

The Meaningful Inclusion Project  
  
A five-year WAGE-funded project enabled Salal to evaluate its own inclusion process, practices, and the accessibility of services. The project produced a framework for other organizations working to meaningfully include trans and gender diverse survivors in a sector that has long excluded them.

**2023**

WAVAW became Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre.  
  
The rebrand reflected years of intentional internal work to align the organization's name with its decolonizing, intersectional, and inclusive values. Inspired by a coastal plant, Salal symbolizes resilience, healing, and community-rooted care.

**2024**

Salal moved into a new, purpose-designed space created to meet the needs of survivors. After over 40 years in spaces that weren't designed with survivors in mind, the organization can now offer a welcoming, healing-centered environment.

**2025**

The Promising Practices Blueprint!  
  
This document captures the journey, lessons, missteps, and commitments behind Salal's work toward meaningful trans inclusion in the anti-violence sector, offering guidance for other organizations beginning their own inclusion journeys.

**Future**

Inclusion work cannot - and will not - stop. Salal remains committed to evolving, learning, reflecting, and evaluating. This ongoing process is embedded in every aspect of our work.

## Initial Steps to Inclusion



In the 1990s, when Salal was known as WAVAW, the organization took a significant step to explicitly communicate the inclusion of trans women in its services. The organization's gender mandate was then updated to clearly state that trans women were welcome and able to access services at Salal.

At the time, this was a significant contrast from the mainstream anti-violence sector and feminist movement, both of which were grappling with deeply held transmisogyny. In the 1990s, feminist spaces were in deep conflict about the inclusion of trans women, conflict that created ruptures still felt today. While some organizations have since shifted to explicitly include trans women, many have not, and a culture of exclusion and harm continues. Salal's starting place may have differed from that of others currently in the sector, but the urgent need remains the same: to build the capacity to create truly inclusive, affirming spaces for trans and gender diverse survivors. This Blueprint is one step toward meeting that need.

## Project Overview

As a feminist organization with over 40 years of growth and evolution, Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre (formerly WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre) has witnessed significant shifts within the anti-violence sector.

Our journey towards inclusion for trans and gender diverse survivors has required deep reflection, ongoing repair, and an unwavering commitment to meaningful change - work that is urgently needed and remains ongoing.

In 2016, feedback from both staff and volunteers prompted a re-examination of Salal's gender mandate. Questions emerged around who could access services and care, particularly regarding why trans masculine and gender diverse individuals were not receiving the support they needed and deserved. In some cases, trans masculine people were even asked to leave the organization due to their transition.

Further, while Salal had been welcoming of trans women since the 1990s, few trans women were walking through our doors. This gap between intention and impact highlighted the need for deeper structural and cultural change before we could offer services that were truly inclusive and affirming.

In 2017, Salal applied for and received funding from the Canadian Department of Justice to begin the initial phase of our inclusion work. The first step was to look inward. Over the course of that first year, the work was almost entirely internally focused - consulting with staff, board members, and volunteers; offering training; updating intake forms, internal policies, and procedures; and seeking guidance from experts in the field.

We made the difficult but necessary decision to delay the launch of trans-specific services. While the need for support was urgent, we recognized that moving too quickly - without first doing the foundational work - risked causing more harm than good. A full year of internal reflection, evaluation and policy development felt necessary to back up our practices, as we knew that symbolic gestures - like rainbow stickers or inclusive language alone - would not suffice.

This work is not quick project work - it's long-term, intentional, systemic, and relational. Taking a full year to look inward was a deliberate choice rooted in care and responsibility. We needed to ensure that when trans survivors did walk through our doors, they would be met with more than updated policies or visual signals, they would be met with real change, understanding and welcomed into services that truly affirmed them and met their needs. That takes time, and it's work that continues.

In April of 2018, we officially expanded our services to include all trans, gender diverse and Two-Spirit survivors, and launched our 'Inclusion Stream' of by-and-for services. To date, we have addressed gaps and barriers through community consultation and program evaluation, and have performed extensive community outreach at low-barrier support service organizations, aiming to reach 2SLGBTQ+ and gender diverse survivors who may not have found their way previously to Salal.

In 2020, Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) awarded Salal funding to continue our Meaningful Inclusion Project, with a focus on developing this Promising Practices Blueprint. Designed as a touchstone, the Blueprint supports organizations in creating more inclusive services for survivors of sexual violence of all marginalized genders. It shares insights from our own process of evaluating gender affirming services, including lessons learned, challenges faced, and the steps we've taken toward accountability. Grounded in community consultation, this resource offers tools and reflections to support others in navigating change and better serving queer and trans survivors.

Through these Promising Practices, we hope to contribute to a sector and nationwide shift, helping others implement policies and practices that create more accessible and inclusive environments for all survivors. The journey will take you through strategies, approaches and recommendations gained from Salal's work. This work is not easy, but change has to begin somewhere, and we hope this Blueprint serves as a starting point and touchstone to guide you on this journey.

## Why Trans Inclusion?

2SLGBTQ+ [communities and gender-gender diverse people face the highest risk of violence](#) in Canada: [transgender people](#) are twice as likely as cisgender women to experience intimate partner violence and 50% of all transgender people have experienced sexual assault. These statistics show us that a lens of gender-based violence which does not center trans people upholds cissexism at the cost of missing an essential perspective on how gender-based violence shows up in the world. Recognizing that trans people experience more gendered oppression than cis women reframes the question from 'Why do trans inclusion?' to, 'Why haven't we done this sooner?' and 'What are we missing as a result?'.

The existing anti-violence sector was created around the experiences of cisgender, heterosexual, white survivors of sexual violence. [As a result, these mainstream services, though often well-intentioned, frequently fail to meet the needs of trans survivors.](#) This creates conditions of double harm; trans people are first excluded from anti-violence services, and then - if they are able to access support - find that their realities are not reflected in services offered or the approach of most support workers.

In fact, trans survivors often experience harm when trying to access support through women-serving organizations; encountering discrimination rooted in their gender identity and expression. This includes imposing expectations of feminine gender expression and inadequate staff intervention during cases of harassment that frequently occur. All within spaces that should be places of care, dignity, and healing for survivors.

The sector's focus on cisgender, heterosexual women's experiences is reflected structurally as well as interpersonally. For example, while the feminist movement has fought for violence against women to be taken seriously and addressed through systemic legal responses, the anti-violence sector has historically represented cisgender white women - those most able to access the legal system safely. As a result, this bias has entrenched carceral responses as an inseparable part of the sector. Importantly, this cycle is reinforced through the ongoing advocacy of the feminist anti-violence sector and sustained through resulting funding streams, creating a feedback loop of biased program creation and evaluation that excludes trans and racialized survivors. Organizations then design services primarily suited for white, cis women, who are the main service users, generating data that validates their effectiveness. Governments, in turn, rely on this data to determine future funding priorities, perpetuating the cycle.

Meaningful trans inclusion is more than inviting trans people to access existing anti-violence services; it requires radically reimagining how we understand violence and the services we offer in response, and personally unlearning internalized white-heteronormative biases as a means to work towards a safer world, together.

The disproportionate harm experienced by trans individuals, combined with a lack of staff advocacy and systemic support, exemplifies the urgent need for this Blueprint, that addresses these gaps and demands transformation across the anti-violence sector nationwide.

## Welcoming People of Marginalized Genders

Salal recognizes that the use of terminology and vocabulary related to queer and trans communities is impacted by access, and that not everyone has had the space and opportunity to learn them. Salal recognizes that not everyone, and not every organization, will have an expert-level understanding of terminology or vocabulary relating to the queer and trans community. Though this language may be unfamiliar, our aim is to invite organizations and individuals into a place of shared understanding. We acknowledge that entering this work while still developing understanding can feel daunting, and many organizations may fear 'getting it wrong.' That said, we believe that by engaging in this process with humility and a commitment to learning, we can collectively create more inclusive environments for all.

We have grappled a lot with language in our trans inclusion work. ['People of marginalized genders'](#) was created as an umbrella term in order to describe our mandate – the longer version of it might read: trans and cis women, Two-Spirit, and gender diverse people. This term reflects how all of these people experience marginalization due to their gender; not in all the same ways, but always in ways that heighten their risk of experiencing sexualized violence. People of marginalized genders are made unsafe because of their gender, and it's this oppression that we speak to as a feminist organization.

Please see the glossary for support with definitions.

(Further reading: [What We've Learned Since Introducing the Definition of People of Marginalized Genders](#))

(Further reading: [WAVAW's rebrand to Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre](#))

## What's To Gain From This Blueprint

As we've navigated this inclusion work, we've centered the wisdom shared by survivors and their voices have been heard throughout this journey and reflected throughout the Blueprint.

**While we call this a Blueprint, it is not a step-by-step guide.** Every organization's journey toward more inclusive practices is going to be unique, moving at different paces and facing different challenges. For instance, city-based organizations may have a different client base with a different set of needs compared to those based in rural areas. Our hope is that, after engaging with the information presented in the Blueprint, other organizations can apply its guidance to their specific setting and feel empowered that they too can create the internal change that is needed to better serve trans and gender diverse clients.

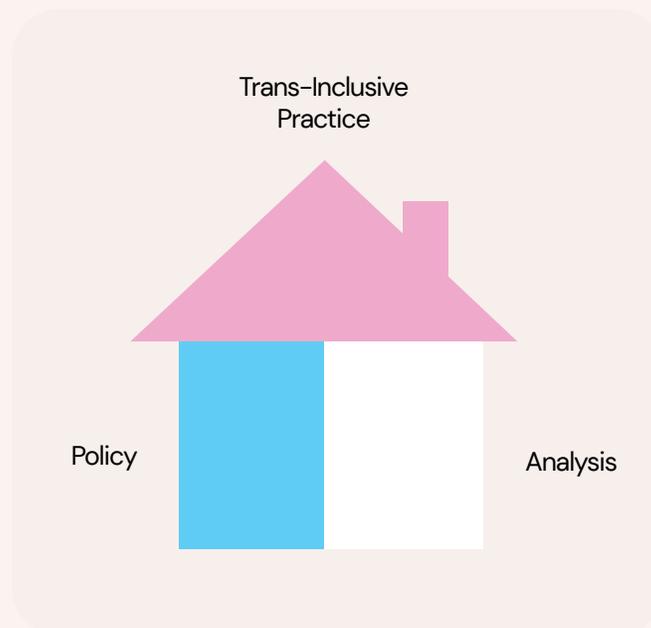
We have broken this Blueprint down into different sections to ensure that the depth and gravity of this work is captured. Included is practical guidance for organizational change such as job postings and interview questions to better support the hiring of queer and trans staff. While it does not contain the original materials themselves, it offers suggestions for how organizations can revise their own resources to suit their context. The Blueprint also outlines examples of workshops offered by Salal, and references relevant news articles and blog posts to support further learning and reflection.

To be truly inclusive, it is not enough to simply invite a community in to use your services, especially when these services were not originally built with them in mind. Inclusion means building specific programs, frameworks, policies, and practices that center those communities, while understanding the intersecting identities that shape diverse communities.

Be aware of scarcity thinking and the feeling of fear as both will likely emerge - pause and hold them both with compassion and then let them go. We invite you to join us in this crucial work of transformation.

# Promising Practices

## The Framework for Holding Up Trans-Inclusive Practice



As you read through this Blueprint, we encourage you to keep this graphic in mind. The structure is designed as a house: the left wall represents policy, the right wall represents analysis, and together they hold up the roof - trans-inclusive practice.

## The Framework for Holding Up Trans-Inclusive Practice

When most organizations approach us for support with trans inclusion, they tend to focus on the policy pillar. This often involves updating intake forms, removing explicitly gendered language, creating a transitioning at work policy, implementing anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, clearly stating their commitment to trans inclusion on their website, and ensuring access to gender-neutral washrooms.

Ensuring that your policies are trans inclusive is only half of the picture. While policy updates are often a tangible and accessible starting point, there is a risk of falling into a perfectionism trap, spending excessive time refining policies while failing to develop a trans-centered analysis. The most effective approach acknowledges that policies will likely need adjustments over time. We encourage organizations to view policy work as part of an ongoing, holistic process that requires regular evaluation and revision.

The analysis pillar, on the other hand, determines an organization's ability to be responsive to the needs of trans clients. When we talk about analysis, we are speaking to the depth of understanding an organization has about the lived experiences of trans people, the barriers they face, and the broader systemic forces at play. This can also be referred to as responsiveness or relevance, as it shapes how well an organization can adapt its services to meet the evolving needs of trans communities. **It involves understanding the socio-political context in which violence against trans people occurs and tailoring services accordingly. Unlike policy, analysis is more difficult to quantify, which often leads to it being neglected.**

Much of this Blueprint focuses on fostering this critical analysis, and we encourage organizations to explore what it means both for the specific communities they serve and within their broader societal context.

For truly robust trans inclusion, both policy and analysis are essential. Just like a house, if one pillar is missing, the roof - our practice - will collapse. You cannot separate the social conditions and legacy of the feminist movement from the other aspects of trans inclusion; continuous analysis helps us understand how broader oppressive forces like transphobia and transmisogyny shape our work and deeply impact survivors.

**The release of this Blueprint in 2025, at a time when anti-trans rhetoric is sweeping across the world, feels all the more important and profound.**

# Promising Practices 1

**Understanding the Social Conditions  
for Two-Spirit, Trans, and Gender  
Diverse People**

## Understanding the Social Conditions for Two-Spirit, Trans, and Gender Diverse People

“The silence happens because we know that breaking it risks bringing more hatred to our communities from a heterosexist world. Every time I talk to groups of social workers about queer-on-queer violence, I have an old knot in my stomach that says, don’t tell them this part. They already think we’re all sick.”

- From ‘Recognition: Queer and Trans Writing on Sexual Harm’

The sentiment above represents one of the most significant challenges in Salal’s inclusion work. Initially, trans people were very resistant in sharing the ways violence shows up between queer and trans people, and for good reason: given the historical and ongoing context of stigma and pathologization of trans identities, survivors were reluctant to air their community’s ‘dirty laundry’ to workers within a sector that has participated in harm towards them.

In order to understand how and why the silencing of violence happens within queer communities, it’s important to first understand the context of stigma and pathologization directed at them. There are deeply held beliefs in our society that queer and trans relationships are inherently unhealthy or harmful, and that [transness itself represents mental illness](#). It wasn’t until 2019 that the World Health Organization removed transgender from the category of mental and behavioural disorders - acknowledging that transness is not a mental health condition - and that its classification as such had been contributing to harmful stigma. With this in mind, we can understand why queer and trans communities resist acknowledging inter-community violence, as it is likely to increase this stigma.

Here, we offer insights into community violence with immense gratitude for the survivors who have shared them with us, and we ask that readers engage with the nuance of these findings and actively resist further stigmatizing trans and queer people.

## ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF VIOLENCE

In several of Salal's inclusion workshops, we introduce the concept of the Ecological Model of Violence:



This model illustrates the broader factors that shape the context in which violence between two people occurs. In our workshops, we encourage cisgender participants to position themselves in the outermost circle titled 'in dominant culture'. In order to understand what has happened between two individuals, they must first move through the two outer circles of understanding. This 'outside-in' model encourages learners to understand context first, which is often different from workers' instinct to understand a particular incident first.

### In Dominant Culture

Culture plays a large role in what can impact [violence](#) between two individuals. [Anti-trans rhetoric](#), hate crimes and [hate speech](#) are not just on the rise in the way they were when we began writing this - they are dominating public discourse. Throughout the timeline of this project, we have witnessed a significant and alarming increase in an environment where trans and gender diverse people face heightened risks, less access to safety and where the urgency of this work has only deepened.

**Violence within queer and trans community does not happen in a vacuum;** it is informed by the current socio-political lens of trans lives, which is situated within [anti-trans rhetoric](#) in [politics](#), historical [attitudes](#) towards trans people within the anti-violence sector, [popular culture](#) and [media](#). Through many conversations with trans survivors, we have seen the ways in which structural harm from outside of the community creates the conditions for interpersonal harm within the community, to the extent that inter-community violence is best understood as an extension of structural transphobia.

[This is not “just an American issue”](#) as many claim it to be. In recent years, anti-trans sentiment is happening in Canada with an alarming increase. [During Pride Month, queer businesses were damaged.](#) The rise of trans hate in Canada has been so meteoric, [a risk map has been produced and is being updated regularly.](#) In 2024, Amnesty International condemned Alberta Premier Danielle Smith’s alarming proposed anti-trans policy changes, calling it an “alarming affront to the rights of trans and gender diverse people that must be withdrawn immediately.” [The Saskatchewan government](#) is taking similar steps to strip trans and gender diverse people of their rights, despite criticism from experts and legal scholars as [unconstitutional](#). The former Premier of New Brunswick brought in [laws specifically](#) targeting trans youth. The harm that these laws and politicians will do, and are doing, to queer and trans youth is so deeply concerning that the [Canadian Civil Liberties Association](#) has released a statement in response.

There is also increasing discrimination towards trans people in sports. Cis people, many without any sort of medical credentials or training, [are trying to ban trans athletes from all levels of competition](#), with an almost obsessive focus on trans women in sports. This is incredibly damaging to all athletes; if an athlete does not conform to stereotypical standards of feminine presentation, speculation arises that she is “not really a woman”. A prime example of this happened in 2024 with [Algerian boxer Imane Khelif after she competed in the 2024 summer Olympics](#).

While trans representation in popular culture has improved, negative depictions of trans people still impact public perception. When popular culture and media portray trans people in negative ways, it normalizes and excuses violence towards trans people, and directly contributes to violence directed at trans people from cisgender and straight people. Violence that comes from outside of the community, such as cisgender and heterosexual people assaulting trans people and then claiming ‘[trans panic](#)’, can be understood as an impact of this outer circle.

When trans people are routinely dehumanized in the public imagination, it creates the conditions for the objectification which we know to be at the root of sexual violence. It can also create internalized transphobia which makes it difficult for trans people to recognize and seek support following violence.

## In Queer and Trans Community

Moving to the middle circle, harm from dominant culture can be internalized by queer and trans communities to create harmful community norms and attitudes. This middle circle best represents what has been called ‘minority stress’ in other models, or the cumulative stress that equity-denied groups face that can lead to poorer social determinants of health, as well as lateral intercommunity violence.

Because systemic oppression makes many support services unsafe to access for queer and trans people, these communities are often dependent on one another to meet their basic needs of food, housing, and

employment. This dynamic creates conditions wherein risking community ties by leaving a relationship or exposing an abuser can carry a much higher cost. Similar to other insular and marginalized communities, trans survivors are more likely to stay in abusive relationships as a means of survival. It's important to affirm their autonomy in this decision-making as it's very likely that staying is less dangerous than leaving.

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Transmisogyny and internalized homophobia are community issues that can lead to violence between individuals. For example, a significant portion of the transmisogyny in our society stems from Trans-Exclusionary Lesbian Feminist organizers, more frequently referred to as TERFs. TERFs align themselves with radical feminist ideologies and reject the inclusion of trans people, especially trans women, in women's spaces, such as transition houses and women's shelters. TERFs frequently use the language of feminism and women's rights movements to justify discrimination and exclusion, which contributes to real harm and violence against trans people.

TERFs rarely extend this same level of hostility toward trans men or transmasculine people, though they do [refer to trans men as "gender traitors" with some level of frequency](#). This strain of exclusionary feminism misdirects legitimate anger at patriarchy - specifically the harm done by cis men - onto trans women, reinforcing patriarchal gender norms as a way to police and punish transness. Many queer and trans communities have a history of tolerating this transmisogyny rather than jeopardizing community ties, and trans women are more likely to avoid engaging with the broader queer community as a result.

Even within the trans community, there can be pressure to conform to narrow definitions of transness, representing white and western understandings of gender. White, transmasculine people's experiences are usually centered in conversations about trans issues, which erases the experiences of BIPOC trans people and, over time, has platformed their issues over others. (Black trans women face exponentially high rates of violence, for example, and that is often not talked about in community as frequently as it should). Some trans people have shared that this is a result of internalized transphobia. Refusing to conform to these community pressures and standards can lead to negative consequences, such as community exclusion. Cultural expressions of transness are sometimes criticized as being 'not trans enough', which we can understand to be an impact of the outer circle of dominant culture manifesting as [respectability politics](#).

Additionally, trans survivors have shared with us the intense pressure to maintain a positive image of the queer community, especially in context of the dominant culture described above. This typically creates an environment of silencing and denying abuse within queer relationships, and some queer people have described the cognitive burden of keeping themselves safe from queer relationship abuse, while denying

described the cognitive burden of keeping themselves safe from queer relationship abuse, while denying that it exists.

When organizations understand the broader social and systemic factors affecting queer and trans communities, they can tailor their services to better meet their clients' needs. Awareness of how these external pressures are impacting a marginalized community can then shape policies, and guide how the organization engages with the queer and trans communities. It's important to develop an understanding of this middle circle in the geographic community you serve in order to do meaningful community engagement.

## Between Individuals

Once we've understood the outer layers of harm, we can look at what has happened between two individuals. A feminist lens will provide the necessary tools to look at power and privilege. It's very likely that clients accessing services will be most interested in discussing this innermost circle, and will understandably want to share what has happened to them without exploring the socio-political context. We encourage workers to consider context when framing conversations with survivors, without necessarily reframing your entire conversation. We have found that trust is best built with trans survivors when we can reflect this understanding in the questions we ask and the planning we offer. **Deeply considering the outer two layers of this model should impact the way workers talk about violence, which will in turn build trust with trans clients.**

### Consider this scenario:

Heather calls our crisis line and tells you that she is a Black trans woman. She tells you that her partner, Miranda, insists that she not tell anyone in her community that she is trans, because they are both lesbian feminist organizers and Miranda fears she will lose her community if people think she is with a man.

Last night, Miranda sexually assaulted Heather while Heather was asleep. Miranda insists that it couldn't be sexual assault because they are both women, and that calling what happened assault is insensitive to the sexual abuse Miranda experienced from her father as a child – something Heather could never understand because she was 'raised as a boy'.

**Referring back to the Ecological Model of Violence, what is happening in this situation?**

## In Dominant Culture

Because of the persistent stigma towards polyamory in mainstream culture, it can be harder to have open conversations around consent. Non-normative/queer sexualities are pathologized in mainstream society as well. In this case, these dominant culture norms have created conditions in which discussions of consent are more difficult as naming the potential for harm at this party risks affirming this stigma.

## In Queer & Trans Community

There is a level of hypersexualization placed on the queer community which can sometimes lead to the (false) assumption that queer people are always consenting, that the queer community is always a safe space, and that queer and trans people are not capable of committing acts of violence. Because queer sexuality is stigmatized, queer spaces are often hypersexualized as they are the often the only place many queer people feel able to express their sexuality. As a result, queer people can struggle to find community outside of sexualized spaces, and may choose to have sex in order to access community.

## Between Individuals

There is a clear lack of communication and boundary setting between the partners.

It would be easy to talk about this simply as a lack of boundaries, consent, or communication, but that overlooks much of the bigger picture. Looking at just the part between individuals can lead to victim blaming (they should have set better boundaries, had clearer communication, etc). This is the fundamental difference from a traditional feminist analysis of cis men rape cis women - these scenarios look at lateral violence and internalized oppression, and not only a top-down weaponizing of privilege.

When considering these three layers of context, it's important to consider all of the sociopolitical factors that might be at play. Location in particular is a factor in how current social conditions impact the queer and trans community. This project took place in Vancouver, a city with a vibrant and active queer community, and while that does come with its own unique set of challenges, doing this work in a somewhat politically progressive area did allow for ease of access to community, organizations and resources.

Rural areas present a different set of perspectives, challenges and interactions than urban settings. To find community in rural areas can be risky - most community gatherings and social events are unadvertised and rely on word of mouth. **For those doing work in rural areas, do not be discouraged if the work moves slowly. Queer and trans people need time to build trust with organizations, and it may take longer to develop an understanding of these three layers specific to your geographic location.**

## No Perfect Referrals

Many staff and organizational leaders are tempted to expand their referral network as a primary means of inclusion. Unfortunately, there are very few meaningful referrals to make that support trans people: there are almost certainly no trans-specific housing or mental health supports in your area, and those who serve all genders are unlikely to be responsive to trans people's needs. **If you are undergoing meaningful trans inclusion work, you are likely the best support in your area.** We encourage you to resist the urge to lean on referrals for trans inclusion; they can be a useful support, but it's more likely that the most important part of offering referrals will be helping clients navigate imperfect systems and make informed choices about how to face systemic transphobia.

If you don't know how accessible some of your referrals are, asking them about their inclusion work beyond the basics is a good way to start a dialogue in your area. Given the context of systemic violence towards trans people, a vital role for allied anti-violence organizations to play is to champion inclusion in your network. At Salal, we have had difficult conversations about when to advocate with other organizations and when to refuse to refer to them at all. This has meant resisting fragility and virtue-signalling, and often staying in relationship with organizations who intend to do better. We approach this work with humility knowing our own imperfect history with trans inclusion.

Understand that, because of systemic transphobia, there is no perfect referral to make for clients, and be prepared to share difficult information about the lack of accessibility of some of your partner organizations. Your work to build robust referral streams is best done alongside meaningful inclusion work within your own organization - while considering your mission and the gaps that you begin to see for those accessing your services.

## Walking With Trans Communities

**There is intention behind beginning this Blueprint with a focus on the socio-political context.**

As outlined throughout the beginning of this guide, this work does not start with creating services, policies, or programs - it starts with understanding. We cannot meaningfully advance trans inclusion without first deepening our awareness of the broader political climate, cultural narratives, and systemic forces that shape the everyday lives of trans people. This understanding is not static - it is continuous, relational, and ever-evolving, as we are witnessing in real time.

To walk in solidarity with trans communities, especially in moments when anti-trans rhetoric dominates political discourse and fuels harmful legislation, means showing up, even if internal changes within your organization aren't yet possible. This might look like attending protests or marches, amplifying trans voices, or using your social media platforms to clearly state your values. These actions signal to trans people that you are paying attention, that you care, and that you are committed to learning, listening, and standing alongside them in whatever way you can.

## RESOURCES AND TOOLS

1. [EGALE Canada has a resource guide to combat anti-trans hate.](#)
2. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) [also has a guide and other resources.](#)
3. For those in the USA, Lambda Legal [has an extensive list of information and resources.](#)
4. Canadian Equality Consulting also offers [information on how to combat anti-trans rhetoric.](#)
5. Adrienne Smith, a Vancouver-based lawyer offers [workshops focused on the legal side of transphobia and how to combat it.](#)
6. Barbara Findlay, another Vancouver-based lawyer offers [workshops specifically on unlearning oppression.](#)
7. [FORGE](#) has a number of recorded webinars on trans IPV.
8. [Restoring the Circle](#), by the Native Women's Association of Canada, is an excellent self-paced course on the context of GBV towards Two Spirit people.
9. [Queering Sexual Violence](#) is a book written by and for queer people, and was integral to our early understandings of this work.
10. [The Revolution Starts at Home](#) is a book which looks at intercommunity violence in activist communities.
11. The Northwest Network is an organization based in Seattle that focuses on queer and trans IPV.
12. [The Antiviolence Project](#), another queer and trans focused initiative based out of New York, has an excellent [assessment tool](#) for discerning abusive tactics in relationships.
13. [Love is Respect](#) has produced a queer-specific [power and control wheel](#).
14. [Egale](#) has published research on trans experiences of intimate partner violence.
15. Alberta Council of Women's Shelters has a variety of inclusion materials and a [list of resources to support survivors](#).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Combat transphobia, transmisogyny and all forms of hate speech with the same commitment and strategy. Staff and volunteers can often draw from their existing skills in challenging other forms of hate to build confidence in addressing transphobia and transmisogyny. By applying a consistent approach across the organization, you strengthen your allyship and foster a culture of inclusivity. Regularly review your policies with staff and volunteers and ensure that they are current, effective and understood by everyone.
2. Engage in activism that directly supports trans rights, whether through advocacy, policy change, or public education.
3. Partner with community organizations to stand up against anti-trans rhetoric and hate speech.
4. Be aware of the current political climate and how that can impact your queer and trans clients. Understand that they may want to discuss issues that may not fully fall within your mandate and allow time and space for this.
5. Show up in community to be in solidarity with queer and trans survivors. Host or attend events that signal solidarity and safety. Building relationships will help you understand the three layers of harm in the ecological model specific to your location.
6. Consider the context of harm when working with trans clients, particularly when discussing safety planning or engaging with other systems like hospitals or police, reflecting the realities of violence

## REFLECTION

1. How are the current anti-trans laws and policies impacting your clients? Your staff? How are you addressing them? Does your analysis of violence include structural transphobia and transmisogyny?
2. What does the queer and trans community have to gain from talking about intercommunity violence? What's at risk?
3. Are you acting in solidarity with the trans community in your area? Have you heard from them on how to improve?
4. What are 3 tangible things you can do in the next 6 months to improve your organization or programs to actively welcome and uplift the queer and trans community?
5. Have there been anti-trans or anti-SOGI protests in your area? What did you do to show support to the trans community? Is there anything you would do differently now?

# Promising Practices 2

Shifting Organizational Conditions  
to Prevent Harm

## Shifting Organizational Conditions to Prevent Harm

Inclusion work is not as simple as flipping a switch. It is not a one-time action: it requires thoughtful planning, genuine consultation, integrity, and sustained commitment. Shifting organizational conditions involves both visible and structural changes, building a foundation that fosters safety, accountability, and inclusivity. Salal has approached its inclusivity efforts with a commitment to trauma-informed and anti-oppressive practices, anchored in an intersectional feminist lens. This approach, shared here as a framework for consideration, emphasizes that creating a safe, inclusive, and responsive environment requires intentional, ongoing change.

Early in the project, it was thought that it might be more expedient for queer and trans people to have separate service organizations entirely, or that queer anti-violence might be better approached by queer-focused organizations, since the women's sector had so far to go to provide services that would be relevant for trans people. However, Salal made the decision to do this work anyways for two reasons: the need for a feminist lens to gender-based violence, which is not always available in queer spaces, and to avoid a situation in which the substantial support that the women's sector receives would be funnelled only to cis, straight women.

### Signalling Safety

The language of “safe spaces” is often used in anti-violence work, but it's increasingly falling short of capturing the depth and complexity required to foster genuine safety - especially for queer and trans survivors. Overuse has diluted its meaning, and the concept of a “space” can unintentionally suggest a bounded, physical or virtual area where safety is contained within certain walls, rooms, or forums. This framing often places the responsibility of safety on individuals or facilitators, rather than naming and addressing the broader systems - transphobia, racism, ableism, colonialism - that permeate every environment we operate in.

We've been reflecting on this, and are shifting toward the language of *fostering safer environments* rather than *creating safer spaces*. This shift reflects our understanding that safety isn't something that can be built into a room or written into policy alone - it must be cultivated in every interaction, and embedded throughout our organizational culture, systems, and structures. The term *environment* captures a broader lens - encompassing the social, cultural, institutional, and systemic conditions that shape whether someone can truly feel safe. While visible markers like signage or inclusive language matter, they only hold meaning when grounded in deep, ongoing commitment and aligned with consistent action.

Welcoming spaces go beyond visible markers; they involve structural inclusivity. Considering the Two Pillars approach, it may make sense to start with accessible changes like gender neutral signage, intake forms to include diverse identities, and gender inclusive washrooms. However, real inclusivity requires further

commitment, ensuring that these changes reflect deeper organizational values rather than token adjustments.

### Opportunity for journaling and reflection: what are some of your starting points?

When you begin to include queer and trans people in your organization, it's essential to create an atmosphere where trans and queer survivors feel assured of their safety. Consistent, visible signals can communicate your commitment, and they can be both physical, such as trans affirming signage or posted community guidelines, or interpersonal, such as interrupting any transmisogyny or transphobia. Ultimately staff should be prepared to uphold the values that you've made visible; in other words, visible signals of safety such as signage and posted community guidelines can be an important first step, but they are only as impactful as the staff upholding them. At Salal, we conduct a robust onboarding process with new employees and also offer continued training on transmisogyny, transphobia and other 'isms' at every level from crisis line workers to board members. While the goal of building capacity for staff to understand transmisogyny and transphobia has been easily met at Salal due to our accompanying frameworks and values, the practice of interruption has been more of a challenge. Staff have provided feedback that it can be a challenge to address micro and macro aggressions when it comes to other survivors in support group settings or out in community when staff are representing the organization.

## Inclusive Language

Language reflects values. Use inclusive, affirming language in all materials, including signage, intake forms, and internal and external communications. Ensure that language respects and acknowledges diverse identities, such as using "all genders" instead of "women and men" where appropriate, and continually review language practices as part of regular policy updates to stay aligned with community needs and changes.

Using inclusive language throughout your entire organization is important - whether in your materials, website, job postings, or signage. Equally important are clear policies around language use within your space to ensure that staff, volunteers, and survivors feel safe, welcomed, and aligned.

For example, a question commonly asked to signal inclusivity toward trans and gender diverse people is "What are your preferred pronouns?" However, the word preferred can imply that pronouns are optional or a matter of personal choice, rather than an essential part of someone's identity. Early on in this work, we received feedback that this language can feel minimizing or alienating to trans people, which is something we take seriously, listen to and respond to. In this case, it is better practice to ask simply, "what are your pronouns?" or "what pronouns do you use?"

In addition, consistently introducing yourself with your pronouns - in meetings, in email signatures, on business cards, and across internal resources - helps signal that this work is embedded in your

organizational culture. It's not just a surface-level gesture, but a consistent and intentional practice of inclusion that all staff participate in.

At Salal, we deeply value survivor feedback and recognize that meaningful inclusion is an ongoing process. We won't always get it right the first time, and that's okay. What matters most is that survivors feel safe sharing this kind of feedback and trust that we will listen, reflect, and take meaningful action.

We offer multiple trainings for organizations on trans inclusion and have presented this work at conferences around the world. When organizations approach us to begin their inclusion journey, we start with a Readiness Assessment to determine if they are at a stage where they can effectively engage with the language used in our trainings. If they're not quite there yet, we [direct](#) them to [several resources](#) to [prepare](#) themselves and build a foundational knowledge, ensuring they are at an accessible stage when they attend training.

**Here's a look at the policy section of our readiness assessment:**

	<b>Not in Place</b>  (This will be a new understanding to the organization)	<b>In Conversation</b>  (The need has been identified and options are being considered)	<b>Being Developed</b>  (An action plan is in place & there is capacity to undertake it)	<b>Established</b>  (The work is complete)
<p><b>Policy</b></p> <p>Our gendered mandate includes trans women</p> <p>Our gendered mandate includes all gender diverse people</p> <p>Any forms used are safe for trans people, with care around legal names &amp; sex</p> <p>Staff are given educational opportunities on trans identities</p>				

## Language is Always Evolving

As we've shared, Salal has existed through many shifts within the anti-violence sector. In 2023, we underwent a significant transformation of our own. Formerly known as WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre for over 40 years (originally Women Against Violence Against Women), we rebranded to Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre.

Salal is a plant native to many parts of the Pacific Northwest, chosen with intention and care. We consulted Indigenous botanists to ensure the name was not appropriative. Unlike our previous name, Salal is not tied to colonial place names or limiting identity markers. It locates us geographically, while reflecting values of being rooted, healing, resilient—and everywhere.

The decision to move away from an acronym that centered women was equally intentional. As our gender mandate evolved to support all marginalized genders, our name needed to reflect that shift. And while rape crisis support remains a part of our work, it is far from all we do. Our scope had expanded and our name needed to grow with us.

Importantly, Salal's name change came toward the end of the Meaningful Inclusion Project, not at the beginning. We made this choice to avoid signaling safety that hadn't yet been fully built. We encourage our partners to take a similar approach: prioritize foundational work - change management, policy and process review, community engagement - and only then consider how your organizational name may signal (or limit) safety and inclusion for trans communities.

As you read this section, we invite you to reflect:  
**What does your name say to trans people walking through your doors?**

## Gender Inclusive Mandates

While there can be a strong sense of urgency to make changes or update policies to become more inclusive, especially after receiving critical feedback, this work must be done with careful consideration and a readiness to engage deeply with the communities you aim to serve. As you begin this work, it can be helpful to reflect on whether this shift is reactive to a situation that has occurred which has made you consider changing your gender mandate. Some organizations Salal has worked with have disclosed that they were unaware that trans people needed or wanted to access their services. Others have stated that they do not see trans people trying to access their services and therefore have questioned whether change is necessary. Both of these responses highlight a need to assess the organization's readiness to engage in the inclusion process safely. In contrast, some organizations have received direct feedback from the trans community indicating that their current mandate or service model was insufficient in terms of inclusion.

In contrast, some organizations have received direct feedback from the trans community indicating that their current mandate or service model was insufficient in terms of inclusion.

**If you are approaching this work as a reaction to feedback, will you re-engage with those communities when you update and refine your goals?**

There may come a time when your organization will need to update its [gender mandate](#). [Salal cannot tell you explicitly what yours should be, but we encourage you to look at our organizational values, which were last updated in 2019 at the beginning of our inclusion work.](#)

Salal made the decision to focus on trans inclusion without expanding to include cis men, in order to maintain a focus on gendered oppression as a root cause of sexualized violence, and with the understanding that, because violence against trans people is gender-based, they would benefit from an expanded feminist approach. We made this decision in the context of living in an urban center with partner organizations to whom we can refer cis men to, which is likely not the reality for many other anti-violence organizations. **While including cis men is not antithetical to trans inclusion, we believe that a gender-neutral lens is, as it stops short of proactive inclusion efforts and is not enough to create safety and relevance in services that are built on cissexist assumptions. Creating all-gender services alone will not be sufficient for trans inclusion.** For transparency, it's best to ensure that your gender mandate is clear, available on your website, and able to be articulated by all the entire staff team.

Unfortunately, many services in our sector, particularly in shelters and transition houses, still have policies that require trans women to 'pass' in order to access them. "Passing" means that you are read as your correct gender when out in the world, and is very important to some trans people and not important at all to others.

Policies based on passing are transmisogynistic for many reasons, one of which is because passing comes with a heavy financial cost. In BC, some gender affirming care is covered by provincial healthcare, but some is not, and surgical aftercare is not supported; changing IDs and gender markers is prohibitively expensive and requires access to a notary; and the daily requirements of passing, such as shaving, are inaccessible to many. This is especially important in the context of high levels of poverty in the trans community, and those who are experiencing homelessness face even more barriers. Especially considering the high levels of discrimination and poverty that trans people live with, to require people to pass is to actively exclude many trans people from your services.

## Redefining Safe Spaces

A core component of traditional anti-violence services is the idea of the 'safe space', or, a place where survivors can come to heal and know that they will not face any additional risks of harm. This is frequently the motivation behind creating women's spaces, in order to create an environment free from men who might cause harm. These sort of identity-based spaces can be important refuges from any given type

of oppression, but the idea of 'safe space' in the anti-violence sector has had unintended negative consequences.

Firstly, it's not possible to create entirely 'safe spaces' due to the intersecting ways in which oppressions operate; for example, creating a women's space does nothing to address racism, and does little to create safety for racialized women. It is more likely that spaces that are presumed to be safe will create a false sense of safety and discourage difficult conversations about intersecting harms.

Secondly, the idea of women's spaces being inherently safer can create transmisogyny and transphobia by implying that we can and should police the genders of people in those spaces. **We understand this notion to be a root cause of the transmisogyny in the women's sector.**

Rather than promising safe spaces, especially those defined by gender, we recommend proactively creating safer environment guidelines and building confidence in staff to uphold them. These guidelines should focus on behaviour rather than intent or identity, and it's important for workers to be able to respond to breaches in the guidelines with tact, firmness, and empathy, especially when survivors are in acute trauma or distress. **Supporting a survivor's autonomy can also mean holding them accountable when harm is caused to others.**

That being said, it's important to distinguish between harmful language and a lack of access to queer and trans language. **An important role for workers is to engage in discreet, supportive conversations when it's clear that a breach of group guidelines stems from unfamiliarity rather than discrimination.**

The anti-violence sector can sometimes become a place where language is heavily policed. During an inclusion process, it's critical that spaces don't replicate this dynamic. **While intentional harm should be named and addressed, there must also be room for people to make mistakes, learn, and stay connected to each other throughout the journey.** Inclusion isn't about perfection - it's about transformation, and transformation requires patience and practice.

We encountered this tension internally at the beginning of this project, and we've also encountered it directly within our services. At times, we've had to navigate instances of transphobia within our support groups, where all participants are survivors seeking care. In these moments, it's vital to respond in a way that ensures trans survivors feel safe and understand that discriminatory behaviour will not be tolerated. Equally important is supporting the survivor who caused harm to understand its impact and to offer guidance toward repair. This approach upholds accountability while maintaining a supportive and healing environment for all participants.

**When opening your space to all marginalized genders, it's essential to proactively consider how you will respond to these situations and ensure staff are trained accordingly.** For example, subtle microaggressions that arise during a group counselling session can be challenging to address in real time. Staff must be equipped with both the skills and the confidence to intervene with care.

It's also important to create space for staff to debrief and reflect together, sharing experiences and offering each other feedback. This practice supports continuous learning and helps sustain an environment of safety and trust for everyone involved.

Some of our partner organizations have shared that, especially in drop-in settings, trans women are more policed for their behaviors than ciswomen. For example, trans women reacting to a conflict with expressions of anger, such as shouting, is responded to more harshly than the same behaviour coming from cis women. This is due to bias held by workers and hinges on stereotypes of trans women being more dangerous than cis women. Ensure that your community guidelines are clear enough to provide clear direction on what constitutes a breach, and that they are enforced equally amongst all clients.

There is more about gender mandates in the next section, but for now it's important to consider how any messaging around safe space may be ignoring harm that is already happening. **It may be helpful to reframe this messaging to 'brave space', wherein harms are recognized and challenged instead.**

## Survivor/Perpetrator Dichotomy

Another example of redefining safe space emerged as we began working with queer and trans people, which forced us to reckon with our binary understanding of survivors and perpetrators. We had to confront the reality that it is both possible and common for one person to occupy both roles. In anti-violence work, there has historically been an emphasis on creating spaces free from those who have caused harm, often by excluding cis men. However, centering queer experiences has shown us that gendered access does not guarantee a space free from perpetrators. We are confident this applies across both cis and heterosexual instances of violence as well.

For many queer people, healing work begins after they have caused harm themselves, which is often linked to the impact of surviving sexual violence on their understanding of consent. This reality is true for many people who have caused harm, and when discussing this, it is critical to avoid further stigmatizing queer individuals.

With this in mind, excluding anyone who has caused harm does not create safety nor does it disrupt the cycles of violence. For example, in the first case study from the ecological model, Miranda is both a survivor and a perpetrator of violence. It's likely that addressing her trauma will provide the tools she needs to stop using violence.

Rather than refusing service to people who have caused harm, we recommend implementing robust policies and strategies to ensure confidentiality and safe access for all. In some cases, this may involve asking someone to leave a group or drop-in space if they have harmed another participant. If possible, you can redirect them to one-on-one support, another group, or another service organization.

It's essential to consider how this approach aligns with your organization's policies and practices. For example, do you have a support line? Are there instances when you find yourself defaulting to gendered language, such as asking, "Did he...?" when talking to a survivor about the person who caused the harm?

Reflecting on these instances will help you consider how this dichotomy plays out in your organization and provide some guidance on where to start in addressing these complexities.

## Policy Development

Policy development and analysis should encompass various areas such as the organizational strategic plan, employment contracts, benefits, and programming and services. Your inclusion mandate should work in tandem with the strategic plan, providing a comprehensive foundation for your inclusion work.

Policies must be reviewed, analyzed, and discussed on a regular basis, with updates made when necessary. This will be further explored in *Promising Practice 4: Supporting Two-Spirit, Trans, and gender diverse People in Anti-Violence Work*. Regular policy reviews ensure that your organization's practices align with its goals, mission, and evolving mandate, but also with the needs of the staff. If your strategic plan changes, it's essential to assess how and when these changes will be reflected in your programming.

It's important to recognize that policy work goes beyond specific actions like having staff include their pronouns or having a clearer policy around discrimination. As we've mentioned, most services are built with cisgender, heterosexual individuals in mind. This gap means policies weren't designed for trans and gender diverse individuals, and addressing this requires an overhaul of both policies and procedures. This effort will involve significant work from leadership, HR, and your board of directors, with consultation from staff and external organizations. This is an area where we provide consultation to help guide organizations through the process, ensuring a thoughtful, inclusive, and sustainable approach.

When we talk about overhauling policies to create truly inclusive practices, we mean it involves everything—from how names are recorded in HR systems and email signatures, to ensuring benefits like lifestyle spending accounts and gender affirmation leave are tailored to support trans and gender diverse individuals. For example, when we first implemented gender transition leave, we offered four days. Since then, we've updated it to 12 days and renamed it "gender affirmation leave" to more accurately reflect the purpose and significance of this time for staff. Additionally, staff can access their lifestyle spending accounts for affirming practices like [binding or padding](#), hair removal, or nail care.

**Some examples of policy work for you to start considering:**

1. Transparency in collection of legal names and gender markers. It is sometimes required to collect these, and best practice is to eliminate this data collection whenever possible. We have found that the only time we need to collect legal names is for HR and Payroll purposes for our staff, and when navigating external services like police or hospitals with clients. When it is required to collect legal information, be proactive about sharing why it's required and how the information will be kept confidential.
2. Proactive measures to respond to the impacts of small communities. Knowing that people can be both survivors and perpetrators of violence, what will happen if both the survivor and perpetrator of the same assault want to access services at the same time?
3. Steps that will be taken if either a staff member or client shares an updated gender identity, especially if their identity falls outside of your gender mandate. Center their autonomy in planning for how things like their new name and pronouns will be shared.
4. An 'opt-in' policy for any identity-related work, to ensure that staff are hired for their skills and not their identity. Any additional work around inclusion should be voluntary, including the option to stop that work at any time. Understanding that equity, diversity, and inclusion (DEI) work is skilled, it's best to hire any DEI workers for their skill and not their identities, although lived experience can be considered an asset. There is more about this in Promising Practice #4.
5. Confidentiality in referrals. Many organizations will already have an informed consent policy for cross-organizational sharing of information, which may need an update to explicitly cover legal and chosen names, gender identity, and pronouns. Many clients are navigating complexities related to 'outness' at different organizations, especially gendered ones, so it is important to give them autonomy in what information is disclosed where.
6. Policy and practice for workers to respond to transmisogyny in group or drop-in settings. Similar to other forms of discrimination, we work from an understanding that to avoid or resist interrupting discrimination is to co-sign it, so it's important to set expectations that staff will intervene every time. This policy is best paired with training to increase workers confidence.

## Community Outreach and Engagement

**Advocate for inclusion not just at your organization but also within your community.** As noted, feminist spaces have traditionally not been welcoming to trans and gender diverse people and there is still work to be done to reverse that. Consistent community outreach and engagement is essential to inclusion work.

It is important to be aware of not only how you show up in community, but with whom you show up with. One example of how Salal has done this is with the Vancouver Dyke March, which in 2018 was struggling with the presence of TERFs at their event. They called on several organizations, including Salal, to help, and staff at that time worked with the March to strategize and make repairs with the trans community.

In recognition of the inclusion work that Salal had done, the March invited Salal as an organization to be the Grand Marshals of the 2019 event. Conversely, Salal has stopped participating in Pride events which do not align with our values, in order to maintain the confidence of queer and trans communities. Working to understand the nuances of community engagement will build trust, which will in turn help ensure that you are receiving meaningful feedback on your inclusion work.

## Internal Accountability

**If there are queer and trans folks at your organization calling for systemic change, listen to them. Utilize their knowledge and skills but refrain from putting the burden of the work on them.**

At Salal, internal accountability has been a cornerstone of our inclusion efforts. We have established an internal advisory group composed of both queer and trans staff, as well as allies, specifically focused on the inclusion project. Initially, this group consisted of queer and trans staff working in by-and-for trans services. However, as Salal expanded its trans-inclusive services across the entire organization and trained all frontline staff to work with queer and trans survivors, the group also grew to include staff from various roles.

This group serves as a regular meeting space to discuss emerging themes and challenges faced by trans survivors. It also functions as a forum for reflecting on how we are performing as an organization. Information from these discussions is shared back with the leadership team and has also been provided to our external evaluator, who has been involved since the start of the project as part of the WAGE funding. These conversations inform leadership about areas requiring additional education, training, or structural changes. For instance, training on Dissociative Identity Disorder and kink as part of the healing process were implemented based on the advisory group's recommendations. The group has also played an essential role in evaluating policies, practices, and their impact on trans survivors.

Internal accountability structures like this ensure that our inclusion efforts are grounded in frontline experience, rather than placing the responsibility solely on trans workers to drive change. A clear Terms of Reference has been crucial in maintaining the scope and purpose of this work. Additionally, we have engaged an external advisory group since the start of this project, composed of other organizations and individuals supporting trans and gender diverse communities in the province. This external group helps us share work, gather feedback, and strengthen our collective approach.

*There is more on supporting staff in identity-based change work in Promising Practice #4.*

## Repair With The Sex Working Community

One of the early findings in our trans inclusion work was that our services were not fully accessible to sex workers. This posed a significant barrier to trans people, due to the substantial overlap between trans and sex worker communities. In the early stages of our work, during key informant interviews, we heard loud and clear: the trans community would not engage with us until we had made meaningful repair with the sex work community in response to harm caused by a previously published paper.

This paper, framed as a resistance to binary thinking on sex work abolition and/or the 'Nordic Model,' ultimately reinforced anti-sex work sentiment that remains deeply entrenched in the feminist anti-violence sector. The biases in this framing mirrored the broader feedback loops of exclusion we were trying to dismantle—including the intersections of transmisogyny and sex work stigma.

A key moment of accountability came when we reckoned with this harm and [published an apology to the sex work community](#). The apology was a turning point in the success of our trans inclusion work; it was positively received by trans and sex worker communities, and unsurprisingly, it drew considerable disagreement with our revised stance. Crucially, we created space for thorough staff discussion before the apology was released - so that when it was posted, all of Salal's staff were in agreement and ready to respond to the backlash.

*To the sex worker community,*

*July 18, 2018*

*As an organization, we always say that systems and perpetrators of violence need to be held accountable. This is no different when we have enacted harm ourselves.*

*Today, we're writing this letter to take accountability. We have taken actions that have caused harm to sex workers, and it is important that we take responsibility for those actions.*

This moment pushed us to ask some hard but essential questions: How do you hold the information you're going to receive, especially when it's difficult, painful, and calls for deep pause and change? **When you're driven toward a specific goal, such as including trans and gender diverse survivors in your services, how prepared are you to receive feedback like this - and actually do something about it?** This was a major moment of reckoning for Salal, and it required us to be truly ready to listen to what the community was telling us, and to act on the wisdom that has been shared.

Since then, we've worked to keep this thread present in our inclusion efforts. We collaborated with Peers Resource Society and Transcare BC on We Belong: Addressing Service Inequity for Trans, gender diverse, and Two Spirit Sex Workers. As an organization, we recognize that we will not signal safety and inclusion to these communities if we are not explicitly and expressly working on indicating safety and inclusion to the sex work community. Salal has now made changes to our Constitution to include our commitment to sex working community so this work does not get lost.

## RESOURCES AND TOOLS

1. Salal developed a Readiness Assessment tool to support the Inclusion Team evaluate an organization's preparedness to engage in meaningful inclusion work with us. This document will examine current policies and practices in place at an organization, assess their competencies in working with and serving queer and trans survivors and set the foundation of a training session.
2. Transcare BC has a similar [Organizational Assessment Tool](#) for creating accessible environments for gender diverse people.
3. Salal's "Redbook," a vetted referral resource, supports trans clients in finding safe support beyond Salal.
4. Salal's Trans Hospital Accompaniment Conversation Guide.
5. [EGALE Canada has a training section for workplace inclusion.](#)
6. FORGE's '[Know and Tell Why](#)' for intake and data collection.
7. [QMUNITY](#) offers basic queer competency training, including an online self-guided module that is a great resource for onboarding and a [queer glossary](#).
8. [Transcare BC](#) also offers self-guided online trainings, including Intro to Gender Diversity and Indigenous Gender Diversity.
9. [The Translink Network](#) is a project to bring together and enhance supports for trans-affirming GBV and IPV services.
10. [Advocacy is essential.](#)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Attend events in community to keep informed of what is happening within other organizations and sectors.
2. Form working groups or committees if possible for internal work as well as external. Someone may have been on your journey before and can offer valuable insights; be proactive in starting dialogue across organizations, especially in your geographic area.
3. Consult with staff and volunteers about policies and practices, obtain feedback and form plans to make changes if possible/as needed.
4. Support frontline staff to respond to transphobia and transmisogyny, particularly in drop-in spaces, and create safer space policies for them to refer to.
5. Develop a clear gender mandate that is not dependent on 'passing', and ensure that all staff can concisely describe it.
6. Consistently review your partnerships and referrals. Offer support and conversation as appropriate to organizations you work with who may be trans exclusive or struggling with trans inclusion.
7. Connect with other services in your area to better understand the landscape of support for trans and gender diverse people. Identify which services are affirming and which may not be. Use this information to create a resource or service guide your staff can use to refer survivors to safe and inclusive support.
8. Ensure trans staff are not positioned to speak for all trans people. Their lived experience is valuable, but it must not become the default education tool for the organization.
9. If changing the name of your organization (e.g., removing "women's centre") is part of your long-term inclusion strategy, consider waiting until substantial and visible work has been done. This prevents creating false signals of safety and avoids placing trans and gender diverse people in vulnerable or harmful situations.
10. Consider the kinds of feedback you may receive along the way. Not all of it will be easy to hear - some may challenge your values, identity, or history as an organization. Prepare your team to hold this feedback with care, humility, and a commitment to change.

## REFLECTIONS

1. Is your space visibly welcoming, meaning are queer and trans clients aware that they are welcome in your space? Is that signage backed up by your staff?
2. Are your washrooms gender free?
3. Do you have queer and trans people on your staff and leadership teams? What are you doing to recruit, empower, and uplift trans people in your organization?
4. How has harm showed up in your spaces in the past? How can understanding that history inform the way you work with survivors who have also caused harm?
5. Do you hold any beliefs about cis women's ability to cause harm? How might the assumption that cis women are singularly victims of violence create barriers for trans and queer people?

# Promising Practices 3

Healing from Sexual Violence for Two  
Spirit, Trans, and Nonbinary People

## Healing from Sexual Violence for Two Spirit, Trans, and Nonbinary People

Throughout this blueprint, we've acknowledged the ways in which the gender-based violence (GBV) and anti-violence sectors have been shaped by a cisnormative and binary lens - largely built on an understanding of violence as something enacted by cis men toward cis women. Given the unique context of violence towards trans people, the healing process for queer and trans people will be different than cisgender and heterosexual people. Considering the Two Pillars approach, it's important to offer services that are responsive to trans people's needs, rather than simply increasing access to existing services.

**Trans people are not a monolith** – there are more differences within the community than there are similarities. Therefore, [healing needs will be different for every trans person](#). Some will want a [safety plan](#), some will have one already and do not require a counsellor to plan one with them. For some, their identity will be very intertwined with their healing process, and some may consider their trans identity as entirely separate from the healing process. While there are as many paths to healing as there are trans survivors, we have found some key themes on the healing path for trans people:

### Impacts of Small Community

“I have had a few people just calling to ask if there is certain staff members working here, I think because they're in community with them.”

- Salal staff on the nature of working within their community

“There are some trans folks who will come here just to get connected to the trans community, not necessarily to get counselling around sexual violence at all...”

- Partner organization on their clients and service model

The insular nature of queer and trans communities presents unique challenges and considerations for service providers. Many trans people rely heavily on friends and community for support and healing, which means they may have personal connections with others attending a group - or even with those facilitating it. This can make participating in in-person support groups, or working with a trans service provider, feel intimidating or unsafe.

These overlapping relationships are particularly important to consider when offering group programming focused on queer and trans relationship violence. Facilitators must be supported in navigating the complexities that arise, and group agreements around confidentiality should be revisited frequently. At Salal, we created a comprehensive *Navigating Overlapping Relationships* guiding document to help facilitators identify and hold these dynamics with care.

**This document will look different in every setting, but here's some key pieces from ours:**

'Acknowledge the inherent power differential between themselves and the service-user, and will model appropriate use of personal power at all times.'

'Collaborate with service-users to establish and maintain personal and professional boundaries for the duration Salal services are being accessed by service-users. While it is recognized that workers/volunteers and service-users are equals, their roles must remain distinct.'

The work for this project was done in an urban setting, within a city that has a population of over two and a half a million people. Even in a city of that size, complications arose for queer and trans frontline staff who were working within their own communities. This is something to be aware of in smaller cities, towns and rural areas – those who are doing frontline work may encounter people they know in external relationships with different dynamics and power systems. Keeping this in mind is crucial to providing high levels of compassionate care to trans survivors.

As we touched on earlier in the ecological model, violence within the queer community is rarely discussed in depth. There is a quietly held belief that queer relationships are 'utopian' and that violence is not present in these relationships. Violence enacted toward the queer community (anti-trans hate crimes, political moves to erase legal rights, etc) is what has frequently been at the centre of conversations relating to violence and the queer community. We can understand this silencing to be a continuation of structural violence towards trans people, and there is a need for facilitators of support groups to be aware of the potential for the minimizing of interpersonal violence in groups.

## Urban Vs Rural Community

Small, close-knit towns and communities function in a very different way than large, urban centres. Knowing who to refer to, in what situation, can assist survivors when they seek help. [Having a list of vetted organizations](#) that staff can refer to will allow survivors to attend to their healing in multiple ways, allowing them to have a well-rounded and complete circle of care. For example, our partner organization Prince George Sexual Assault Centre (PGSAC) serves not only the community of Prince George in rural BC, but also a remote, fly-in/fly-out community in remote northern BC. PGSAC has spent time working with

the Indigenous community there, worked to build trust and relationships and offers specialized care for residents. They have creative and unique ways to remain in touch with residents when their service providers are unable to be in community and present with those seeking care. One such method is via secure SMS that allows clients to connect with PG SAC staff for 1-1 counselling and support.

Many non-profit organizations in rural areas often become a “one stop shop” for people seeking services and assistance, which can then put pressure on not only the organizations to serve these populations that may not currently be within their mandate, but also the queer and trans staff to take on work and labour that is out of their purview.

Finally, disclosure of trans identities or ‘outness’ may look different in rural areas than urban. Rural partner organizations have told us that it’s important for their trans clients to have a high level of autonomy in disclosing their identities, which often means making trans or queer specific supports more subtle, or more integrated into mainstream services.

## Expanded Scope of Work

“I think they come because it is an access...they can get counselling. And I think there is just so many other factors or things happening in their lives that it can, I don’t want to say that it takes that backburner, but I think there is. Yeah, I think there is just like there’s a lot more [going on].”

- Salal staff on trans clients accessing frontline services

One recurring theme was that, despite offering specialized services for survivors of sexualized violence, survivors often had more pressing concerns than their sexual assault, such as - housing insecurity, healthcare and community and prioritized these conversations with our counsellors. While their assault brought them to us initially, it was common for the assault to often become de-prioritized due to compounding and intersecting needs.

With respect to the differences between urban and rural service provision, Salal has maintained a focus on providing support for sexual assault, but organizations in areas with less service provision have sometimes chosen to broaden their services to encompass other issues as well. Because there is a lack of general mental health support that is responsive to the needs of trans people, there is often additional strain on any existing services.

Salal has explored several healing modalities outside of traditional counselling, for all of our service users. While many people will want to access one-to-one counselling, we have found that several modalities are more responsive to the needs of trans clients. It is important to note that considering alternate streams of healing can offer a well-rounded and complex level of care for trans and gender diverse survivors.

Art therapy and creative expression can offer powerful alternatives to more traditional paths of healing. We've leaned into this throughout this project through our *Recognition Zines*, which was created to spark dialogue within queer and trans communities about inter-community violence. When we first developed the zine, we noticed that existing resources on this topic were limited and often written about trans and queer people for service providers - rather than being created *by and for the community*. As part of this project, Salal has released 2, soon to be 3, zines and held a virtual art show.

We're launching our 2025 edition of the *Recognition Zine* alongside the closing of this project. This year's theme focuses on **self-healing**, and the process of gathering submissions revealed some important lessons in terms of engagement within the community. Despite extensive outreach through social media, email lists, and our newsletter, we initially received only a single submission. This prompted a shift in our engagement strategy. We turned toward traditional, relationship-based outreach - visiting trusted local bookstores that proudly support trans and queer communities, connecting directly with partner organizations, and fostering in-person conversations. This shift resulted in a wave of beautiful submissions that reminded us of the importance of presence and visibility within trusted community spaces. As we continue adjusting to a post-COVID world, this experience was a reminder that digital engagement, while valuable, cannot fully replace the impact of showing up in person, building trust face-to-face, and meeting people where they already are. For queer and trans communities especially, healing and connection often grow out of these tangible, relational moments.

The 2025 *Recognition Zine* will be made available on our website, and every contributing artist will receive a printed copy of the Zine. We are also exploring other ways to publish and distribute it more broadly, both within community spaces and through potential partnerships. This project continues to be a meaningful example of community-based and survivor-centered approaches to healing.

Similarly, Salal offers a [variety of support groups](#) that cover a variety of topics, such as Creative Resistance, 16 Steps to Empowerment, and Remembering Our Ancestors (a group specifically for Indigenous survivors and grounded in traditional ways of healing). As mentioned, not all trans survivors will want or need the same level, frequency or kind of care. Offering multiple options for healing opens up your organization to helping more people on their recovery journey.

## Healing and Justice

The [Victim Services](#) team at Salal is integral to survivor healing. Salal offers police and hospital accompaniment for survivors who request this support. Staff will travel with or meet survivors at the hospital or police station to offer support, guidance and advocacy as they navigate these systems. Having a calm, reliable and knowledgeable person to assist in navigating these stressful systems is immensely helpful for survivors, especially those who are in crisis.

When any survivor - especially those with marginalized identities - seeks support navigating these systems, the risk of re-traumatization is extremely high. Police/carceral systems and healthcare providers often fail to meet the needs of queer and trans people and survivors often experience discrimination when accessing these systems. For organizations currently serving or preparing to serve queer and trans survivors, it's crucial to understand that many trans individuals are deeply hesitant to engage with medical or legal systems due to well-founded fears of mistreatment, misgendering, and systemic violence<sup>1</sup>.

Salal uses an approach of 'consent to advocacy' in carceral and medical systems. For many trans people, the immediate aftermath of an assault is not when they will want to advocate for their correct names and pronouns to be used, and for others it will be essential for them to access those systems. Salal's Hospital Accompaniment team receive extensive training on how to frame conversations and provide advocacy with healthcare providers, including how to check in with survivors about whether they want this support.

For many survivors, the pursuit of justice is deeply intertwined with the process of healing. In recognition of this, Salal has explored alternative approaches to justice that better reflect the needs of queer and trans survivors. In 2020, we secured funding to launch a Transformative Justice Pilot Project. As our service model continued to grow, it became increasingly clear that many queer, trans, and Indigenous survivors were seeking justice processes that centered on shifting harmful community dynamics, repairing harm, and fostering collective care—rather than systems that isolate survivors or rely on incarceration. While this project was not directly linked to the Meaningful Inclusion initiative, the overlap in both the communities we worked with and the outcomes we aimed for was significant.

As part of this project, Salal asked survivors what justice means to them, in order to better understand what's needed to build trust and confidence in justice processes. We learned that justice means many things to many people: for some, it's about someone being held accountable for the harm they've caused; for others, it's about preventing future harm so that no one else experiences what they did. What was shared across many responses, though, was a deep mistrust in the criminal legal system's ability to offer meaningful justice or accountability - regardless of the outcome. We know that the current justice system does not repair people, nor does it transform the conditions that lead to harm. As a result, many do not believe that someone who goes through the system will come out of it in a place where they are less likely to cause harm in the future.

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<sup>1</sup>[Trans Broken Arm Syndrome](#) is a large issue surrounding trans healthcare.

There exists a long and fraught relationship between the restorative justice sector and the anti-violence sector, and this project represented a small step towards better cohesion. While it remains clear that trans survivors' justice needs are not being met by the carceral system in which many anti-violence services are embedded, this project faced significant challenges - particularly around staff turnover and burnout due to the pressures of working in small and deeply connected communities, as discussed above.

Although this project was not directly tied to the Meaningful Inclusion project, it served as another example of deep reflection, learning, and feedback. We heard clearly that transformative and restorative justice were not created to be held by organizations - particularly those operating within the nonprofit industrial complex. These models were created by communities, as intentional alternatives to systems that many survivors find harmful or inaccessible. We learned that while transformative justice processes are best led by communities themselves, not institutions, offering some kind of alternative to the criminal legal system is essential to begin meeting trans survivors' diverse justice needs.

## The Need for Ongoing Outreach

Within the last year (2023–2024), Salal has begun to gather disaggregated data about our Crisis Line callers. What we've observed is that while some self-identified trans people are calling and accessing services, the number is lower than anticipated - for example, only four Crisis Line callers self-identified as trans in September 2024.

There are several possible reasons for this. Some trans community members may still be unaware that Salal is a trans-serving organization and that they are welcome here. Others may choose not to self-identify due to fear, hesitation, or safety concerns. It's also possible that some trans callers don't feel that their gender identity is central to their healing journey and therefore don't disclose it. Alternatively, some may feel confident in our inclusive mandate and see no need to name their identity in order to access affirming services.

An important point to name and consider throughout any inclusion work is the principle of self-identification. We do not ask survivors to disclose their gender identity to us. All of our Crisis Line calls are confidential and gender identity is not probed. If a survivor indicates they are interested in further services - such as counselling or support navigating systems - we then ask whether they are seeking Indigenous-specific or gender inclusion-specific support. Survivors who indicate this are then triaged accordingly. Salal now has a dedicated data analyst position within the organization, which will allow us to more consistently and accurately track this data moving forward, identify gaps, and inform how we adapt our services to meet community needs.

Trans women and trans feminine people have historically been unwelcome in feminist and women's spaces, while trans men and trans masculine people have also been unwelcome in those spaces as well as in male-oriented spaces. Therefore, organizations must be prepared not only to have important conversations around queer and trans GBV but also be prepared to initiate these conversations with groups of people

who have historically been left out of the narrative. This will require a dedicated effort to signal safety for queer and trans survivors, making connections and trust-building. If your organization is new to inclusion work, consulting and discussing your past and future goals with these communities is important but be prepared to sit with possible discomfort and feedback that may shed light on ways the organization has not always shown up in allyship.

## RESOURCES AND TOOLS

1. Salal offers several workshops and webinars, including [Trans Inclusion for Low-Barrier Services, and Serving Trans Survivors](#).
2. [TransCare BC](#) has many online courses available to learn about trans and gender diverse identities and healthcare.
3. The funder of this project, WAGE, has an online course for those seeking [information around GBV+](#).
4. [Genderoo](#)
5. [Catherine White Holman](#)
6. [Translink Network](#)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Engage with the communities you want to serve. What are their needs and how can you provide these services? How will you begin these conversations? Challenge your assumptions about what anti-violence services are.
2. Build spaces that acknowledge the diversity of the trans community and can accommodate their needs. How will trans and gender diverse survivors see themselves reflected within your organization?
3. Consider alternative forms of justice and healing. Are there transformative/restorative justice options in your area for survivors to access on their healing path? Can you create partnerships with other organizations offering this work?
4. Gather and analyze client data and feedback ethically and with intention. The data will guide you on your journey to providing the best services for your clients.
5. Be aware that trans survivors are not a monolith and will have very different priorities and goals for their healing journey. Recognize that healing is non-linear. Offer multiple entry points to your services and be open to survivors defining what healing means for them. This might look like peer support, creative expression, cultural reconnection, or harm reduction.

6. Have knowledge of other organizations to refer clients to if needed. Sometimes your organization is the best referral, sometimes it's the first place people can contact and speak to a person. Know who can accept clients, what their mandates are and continuously check that these organizations are in alignment with yours.
7. Build a network of partner organizations to lean on for support and resources. Some may have done work you want to do - no need to reinvent the wheel if the work has been done.
8. Offer culturally specific and identity-affirming support. Ensure programming reflects the cultural, spiritual, and lived experiences of the communities you're serving. For many trans survivors - particularly Black, Indigenous, racialized and Two-Spirit people - healing may be most accessible through culturally grounded or community-led approaches.

## REFLECTIONS

1. What is your organization currently doing to provide services for trans survivors? Can they be improved?
2. Have you received any feedback from the queer and trans community about the programming you offer?
3. What stood out to you from this section? Was anything surprising?
4. Consider other service providers in your community - do you have relationships with them? If not, could inclusion work be a catalyst to engage with them and build a network?
5. Are there other organizations you could partner with to fill gaps in your own service model? ex partnering with a more social-oriented organization if yours is a gender-based violence organization.

# Promising Practices 4

**Supporting Two Spirit, Trans, and Nonbinary  
People in Anti-Violence Work**

# Supporting Two Spirit, Trans, and Nonbinary People in Anti-Violence Work

We've emphasized throughout this Blueprint the importance of not overburdening trans and gender diverse staff with the responsibility of leading inclusion work. While lived experience offers valuable insight, it should never be a substitute for organizational commitment or accountability towards full integration.

It's also essential for trans, Two Spirit, and non-binary people to see themselves reflected across your organization at every level. This includes leadership, board members, volunteers, and staff. Representation alone isn't enough; meaningful support for queer and trans staff, particularly those working with queer and trans survivors, is fundamental to the success and sustainability of any inclusion work.

Drawing from staff feedback at Salal, input from community partners, and learnings from our internal policies and practices, we've identified key areas to better support and uplift staff who are doing the important work of serving survivors in their own communities.

The following section outlines human resources and organizational considerations to ensure that trans and gender diverse staff are supported, protected and can sustain working in their roles.

## Benefits for Trans Staff

Providing a comprehensive benefits package can significantly enhance the support your organization offers to staff, particularly for those who are trans or gender diverse. At Salal, we've made it a priority to offer leave for gender-affirming care, in addition to other leave like family member sick leave, moving time and gender-based violence leave. This flexible leave structure allows staff to take time off when needed for gender-affirming medical care for themselves or a family member without sacrificing their financial stability or work commitments.

In recognition of the limitations of our benefits provider in covering gender-affirming wear, we also introduced a lifestyle and health spending account. These accounts help cover additional costs associated with gender-affirming care that are not covered by our primary benefits plan.

We understand that not every organization has the resources or capacity to provide such benefits, but even small, incremental efforts can make a significant difference in fostering a supportive and inclusive workplace for trans staff. Acknowledging these challenges, it is important to have open conversations with your staff about what is feasible and what their needs are.

Additionally, knowing other organizations that offer support to trans and gender diverse individuals or providing information on external resources can help fill gaps in your own offerings. While your

organization may not always be in a position to provide this support, establishing these connections, allowing staff time to research this and attend appointments and fostering dialogue can still go a long way in supporting staff in their personal and professional journeys.

## HR Needs of Trans Staff

Inclusive HR policies are a way to embed inclusive language into your organization and hold yourselves accountable to your staff. Some examples of this are as follows, taken from Salal's most recent HR manual:

*“Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. As an anti-violence organization it is imperative for us to acknowledge that this land is unceded, because colonization was enacted through violence and the creation of systems that oppressed and impacted all First Peoples of Turtle Island.*

*The following Human Resources policies and procedures are guided by our feminist philosophy, and as such, strive to honour the contribution of all employees in the provision of much needed services to women and people of marginalized genders in our community.*

*Every effort has been made to include policies that will ensure the effective management of human resources and fiscal accountability. However, employees are expected to take a common sense and an honest approach to adhering to these policies. We endeavor to provide progressive working conditions that encourage and promote personal health and well-being. As such, we recognize the provisions of the B.C. Employment Standards Act, as a minimum standard of practice, and strive to improve on that standard wherever possible.”*

We have also included a definitions section of our manual:

*‘Marginalized Genders refers to a person whose gender is subject to oppression and violence within patriarchal systems, namely cis and trans women, gender diverse people, Two-Spirit people and intersex people. This term aims to be inclusive of all people who access Salal's services as survivors of gender-based and/or sexualized violence.’*

Salal also has extensive policies surrounding workplace bullying and harassment, conduct and behaviour. One important HR policy is the explicit naming of intentional misgendering as harassment:

*'Words, gestures, actions, or jokes, which may humiliate, degrade or abuse, including intentionally using incorrect pronouns to refer to an individual'*

Trans staff are likely to need more HR support due to the heightened risk of them learning about violence either towards or enacted by people they know. Given the levels of stigmatization and pathologization of trans identities, they are likely to experience internalized transphobia in this work. Recognizing these challenges, Salal pivoted from having dedicated by-and-for staff positions. Instead, all staff are hired based on their comfort level with, and knowledge of, trans gender-based violence (GBV), rather than requiring a trans identity as a condition to work with this community.

Queer and trans staff have also expressed that working within their own communities can have an emotional toll, increasing the risk of burnout. Initially, Salal had a separate counselling stream specifically offering by-and-for services for queer and trans survivors - anyone who identified as queer or trans and requested counselling was triaged into this dedicated stream. While this approach was well-intentioned, it ultimately placed a tremendous emotional burden on the counsellors, both in terms of emotional labour and managing an overwhelming caseload.

After careful reflection, Salal shifted to an integrated counselling model. All counselling staff were, and continue to be, trained to support queer and trans survivors accessing services. This approach ensures that care is not concentrated within a small number of staff, while maintaining equitable access for queer and trans survivors. As part of this integrated model, we have a triaging system that prioritizes trans and gender diverse survivors, allowing them to bypass the waitlist and be connected with a counsellor as soon as one is available.

Following this shift, we have reflected on areas where we could have communicated the transition more clearly. While we engaged in internal discussions and consultations, inconsistencies in the language used to articulate our services sometimes led to confusion. As a result, staff required knowledge of our previous programming and current programming to accurately communicate our services, whether in the community, internally, or on the Crisis Line. Although we have since updated and clarified our messaging and programming, we recognize that we could have done more to ensure all staff and volunteers understood the rationale behind this change, as well as the steps taken to consult with and support those providing these services.

Some staff shared a perception that we were "no longer providing inclusion services," which was not the case. However, due to turnover, volunteer intakes, and inconsistent communication, this messaging got mixed. We have now clarified what we mean by having inclusion programming, ensuring that our

services and commitment to inclusion are clearly communicated and understood across the organization. We deeply value that we have cultivated a workplace where people feel safe to share this feedback, as it helps us continuously improve and ensure that our services are communicated effectively.

Additionally, there have been requests to reintroduce this programming, which is something we are carefully considering. This requires thoughtful reflection and consultation to ensure we can meet the needs of the community in a sustainable and supportive way.

Historically, Salal has attempted to offer support groups specifically for queer and trans survivors. However, due to the insular nature of the queer community in this city, attendance in these groups was never successful. Recently, there have been growing requests to reintroduce these groups, signaling a renewed need for this kind of peer support; this is likely due to the current political climate and the need for community.

In response, the counselling team is carefully considering how to move forward. Since we have reintroduced in-person counselling groups post-Covid-19, we have received really positive feedback, which has influenced our decision-making process regarding the future of support groups for queer and trans survivors. We recognize the importance of these spaces, and we are committed to creating an environment that meets the unique needs of this community.

We remain committed to the ongoing evaluation of our frontline programming and are continuously working to ensure our services are responsive, safe, and accessible. The work does not stop with this project; we are continually adapting and adjusting our programming, services, the grants we apply for, the partnerships we create, and the strategies we implement to better meet the needs of trans and gender diverse survivors.

## Supportive Boundaries

Work in the gender-based violence sector is emotionally demanding for all staff - and this is even more true for trans and gender diverse staff working with clients from their own communities. Inclusion work adds another layer of emotional labour. Clear boundaries and strong support systems are essential. The insular nature of queer and trans communities can make it especially difficult to separate personal life from professional responsibilities, sometimes leading to enmeshment, blurred boundaries, and burnout.

At Salal, we have considered deeply the complex relationship between non-profit helping models and grassroots community building, and the impact of that complexity on our staff. Similar to any insular or marginalized community, queer and trans staff often do this work with the intention of helping their community, and they sometimes feel that this work is a calling more than a job. Given the limitations of the non-profit sector, we have learned that it's best to be clear with staff about the scope of their work and encourage enough work/life balance to allow for them to pursue more grassroots work outside of Salal

if that is important to them. While our work is purposeful, capitalist non-profit systems will not allow it to be anyone's 'purpose', and organizationally it makes more sense for us to focus on building good relationships with community groups doing the grassroots work that we can't.

Because of the emotional impact of working in the gender-based violence sector, Salal has incorporated a "wellness hour" into our collective agreement for unionized staff. Every workday, staff are allotted a paid one-hour wellness break - separate from their lunch hour - which can be used for activities such as exercise, reading, or accessing mental health resources. This intentional time away from work-related tasks supports staff in prioritizing their well-being and has been a beneficial practice in maintaining a healthier work-life balance.

**When you begin this work, what frameworks will you build to ensure that your frontline staff are able to set boundaries in their work?**

Frontline work with survivors is emotional work, and there is sometimes a tendency for clients to latch on to those offering support, counselling or other frontline services. A [topic](#) that has come up in conversations with Salal's frontline staff is that of [enmeshment](#)<sup>2</sup>. It may not occur in every situation but it is important to have policies in place that all staff can follow to ensure that they are not working outside of the service model, putting too much work on themselves or breaching boundaries with clients.

## Identity-Based Change Work

Frequently, inclusion work starts from within and from requests from staff. If your queer and trans staff are approaching leadership with requests to be more inclusive, listen to their requests, take action, but do not place the burden of all of this work on them. Many times, organizations will make the assumption that because they have queer and trans staff, they are able and equipped to handle the entirety of this work.

At Salal, some trans staff have had past negative experiences at other organizations where they were instructed to educate, train and be an emotional support for cisgender, heterosexual coworkers. This is something that we did not want to continue or perpetuate. Instead, support was put in place for frontline staff who work with queer and trans clients. Every counsellor has access to clinical supervisors - some of which are part of queer and trans community - to debrief and get support at regular intervals during their work.

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<sup>2</sup>Enmeshment is a concept in psychology and psychotherapy introduced by Salvador Minuchin to describe families where personal boundaries are diffused.

In order to avoid situations where trans staff are expected to offer training and guidance to cis coworkers - whenever formally or informally - it's important to offer ongoing training on issues relevant to trans survivors.

We are committed to continuous learning and are always seeking innovative approaches to training. Recently, the previous project lead facilitated a series of meaningful conversations on topics such as neurodivergence and consent, and medical transition and sexual assault. We came together to watch panels on these topics that were recorded as part of this project and are available on our Twitch and YouTube platforms.

This is also a great opportunity to develop partnerships and relationships with other organizations that provide support to trans and gender diverse communities. Bringing in external facilitators can be incredibly valuable - not only does this help build capacity across your team, but it also strengthens community ties. As we've emphasized, trans people are not a monolith and many trans staff will benefit from these trainings themselves. This is yet another reason not to rely on trans employees to shoulder the burden of educating others.

As discussed in *Promising Practice #2*, Salal maintains an internal advisory related to supporting trans survivors, which started as an identity-based space and later shifted its membership to staff working with trans survivors instead. It has been important to maintain the focus of the internal advisory on key findings from working with trans survivors, and how they could set direction for this project, rather than it being a primary site of organizational change. While discussing the challenges of this work can be cathartic to queer and trans staff, this space was not appropriate to serve as a primary support for staff. Salal utilized the external advisory committee of trans community partners to promote discussion of themes in the sector that may not have been brought to Salal via clients. This allowed the project lead to have larger discussions of trends, themes, and updates with those not directly involved with the Blueprint and thus could provide a level of needed unbiased feedback.

It's important to develop clear terms of reference for committee work in order to have staff meaningfully opt-in, and to avoid a feeling of tokenizing their identities. While holding any identity may give staff insight into how to best serve people like themselves, it does not grant them a skillset to implement inclusion efforts, and it's important to avoid the trap of the 'glass cliff' wherein any marginalized person is set up to fail with too much responsibility in equity work early in their career.

It's possible that starting inclusion work may draw backlash from cis and straight staff. This can be nuanced; in our community consultations, we have had conversations with anti-violence leaders who have shared that cis and straight staff felt frustrated that their organization is focusing on expanding their mandate while they are still not meeting the needs of some of their clients. Workers have expressed frustration particularly that issues of colonization, racism, and white supremacy are not attended to as robustly as trans inclusion.

For this reason, and in order to serve trans people at multiple intersections of marginalizations, the best solution is to make sure that your inclusion work is intersectional. Communities represented in your staff may fall into the trap of 'divide and conquer', wherein the perceived scarcity of inclusion work sets them up for conflict amongst themselves rather than working together to shift systems. We can validate the knowledge that queer communities can uphold racism and white supremacy, while maintaining that inclusivity is an urgent matter for organizations. **Removing the scarcity of inclusion work will benefit all of your staff and clients.**

While there may be a need for more nuanced conversations, employers will need to draw a line at transphobia and transmisogyny, and may need to reassert the inherent belonging of trans people in anti-violence services. It may be strategic to make any queer inclusivity training optional for staff who are likely to be impacted by transphobia and transmisogyny, and to offer more support and stricter guidelines for staff members who are struggling with inclusion. Before offering any open dialogues about trans inclusion, take stock of who on your staff team may push back, and if necessary mitigate the risk of harm first, and always ensure that trans staff are not expected to remain in conversations that are transphobic.

## RESOURCES AND TOOLS

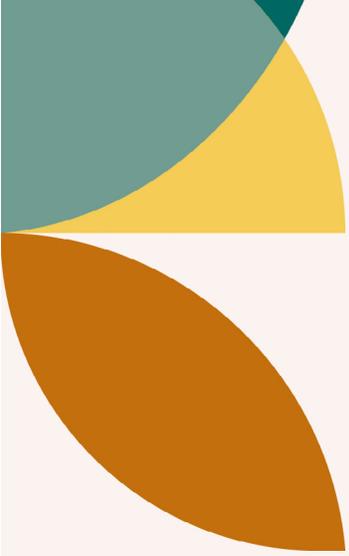
1. [Salal Annual Report 2024](#)
2. [Salal Annual Report 2023](#)
3. [Salal Annual Report 2022](#)
4. [Salal Annual Report 2021](#)
5. [Salal Annual Report 2020](#)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Review the 2020-2024 Salal Annual Reports. The reports give a clear picture of the work, resources and results of the inclusion work over the last 4 years. It also touches on programming changes, creative fund development initiatives and insight on how the organization has navigated the shift to a more inclusive model in conjunction with a global pandemic.
2. Salal offers Clinical Supervision (regular sessions with a counselor) to debrief and discuss the work. There is a high risk of vicarious trauma in frontline work of this nature and it is important to protect the mental wellbeing of your staff. If possible, consider implementing a similar system at your organization. Review the linked document for an overview of the program in place for Salal's frontline staff.
3. Set manageable caseload requirements for staff. It is no secret that burnout is high within the GBV sector. Setting reasonable and realistic expectations for caseloads and client volume will be an asset to the mental health of frontline staff.
4. Understand that not all clients will be available or want to contact counselors or support staff within typical business hours. Allow for staff to have flexibility to meet with clients as needed.
5. It is important to note that not all staff and clients will want or be comfortable with in-person sessions. Allow for flexibility for virtual sessions to protect the health and wellbeing of staff and community.
6. Offer onboarding training on the non-profit industrial complex and/or the limitations of non-profit work, and encourage staff to understand the difference between community organizing and non-profit work.
7. Develop a clear scope and Terms of Reference for any identity-based work
8. Ensure that your inclusion work is intersectional, and set expectations that transmisogyny and transphobia will not be tolerated. Conduct risk assessments before training, and ensure that leadership - never trans staff - is responding to any need for more nuanced conversations about scarcity of inclusion work.

## REFLECTIONS

1. Has this section caused you to think of any policies or practices within your organization that are in need of review or revision?
2. How are you currently supporting the mental wellbeing of your staff? Is there anything you can do to improve that?
3. How are staff currently able to provide feedback on supports available in a welcoming and supported way? Do they feel safe to bring concerns and constructive feedback to leadership?
4. If you have a Board, are the members agreeable to systemic changes happening within your organization? How will you navigate these changes and discussions if they are not?



# Concluding Reflections

**Transforming Together:**

**A Blueprint for Queer and Trans  
Inclusive Practices in the  
Anti-Violence Sector**



## Concluding Reflections

We hope that the information contained within this Promising Practices Blueprint can be of use to you, your organization and your inclusion work. This work is intentional, meaningful, difficult and rewarding. Salal's journey has been, and is, unique to us, shaped by the time, place, and history we are rooted in. **The processes and policies Salal has put in place are also unique to us, but a desire to be inclusive can be universal. We hope that you can look at the work we have done and be inspired to start your own.**

We would like to share the words of a former staff member of Salal, who was instrumental in beginning this project:

*"...have courage. While policies and training are important pieces, they won't help unless the people answering the phone reach past their fear of making mistakes. Just beyond fear, we tap into the good stuff, the deep desire to end rape culture and support everyone impacted by it, and to make meaningful changes to our organizations. It took courage for our founding mothers to set up a crisis line in a basement suite, and we call on that spirit when we ask frontline workers to move beyond the basics of trans inclusion.*

*Re-writing intake forms and learning about pronouns are the fundamentals of inclusion, but they're only half the work. Trans people have asked us to reimagine what anti-violence means. It is messy, imperfect, radical work. As we wrap up our Inclusion Project, it has been our honour to witness the courage of Salal's staff and volunteers.*

*Whenever the road map felt unclear, we came back to our feminism and braved a vision of trans-centered analysis. This is what sets Salal apart. In the first year of our Inclusion Project, we thought about healing the divide between being trans and being a feminist. Three years later, the two feel finally aligned. It would have been easy to update a few forms but it wouldn't have been brave.*

*It takes a similar kind of courage, as trans people, to heal from sexualized violence. We are taught that our bodies aren't ours through cisnormativity, which is the insistence that we don't know ourselves. It would be easy to be defeated, but trans survivors courageously insist on access to healing and justice, and we insist on bodily autonomy against all odds. We do this because we know that we have what it takes to change the world. Every year of this project, we've exceeded the amount of trans people we expected to serve, as trans community refuses to live with sexual violence any longer.*

*Salal's Inclusion Project is over, but the work is not. We will call for courage from our sector as we dig deep into what trans survivors need, and we'll be asking for generosity from the trans community as we continue to grow and change."*

Fear, uncertainty, discomfort, all of these can be powerful deterrents to beginning inclusive work. Take these as learning moments, as invitations. Acknowledge the fear. Name the uncertainty. Be honest with your intentions. Prepare to make mistakes, hear critical or negative feedback and get comfortable with discomfort. From that discomfort, growth and transformation becomes possible. When we choose to change, grow, and lead with courage, we open the door for others to do the same.

**The project has wrapped but inclusion work cannot and will not stop.**

As we open Vancouver's first Integrated Sexual Assault Clinic in 2025, we are placing the needs of trans and gender diverse survivors at the centre, along with other communities who have been pushed to the margins by systemic oppression, who we acknowledge do not feel safe or able to access hospital care. While this is not the case within all our programming across the organization, within our Hospital Accompaniment Program, we have only supported two self-identified gender diverse survivors in hospital post-assault since 2019. That number is not just low - it is a call to action. The clinic is being built in direct response to that gap. Through intentional, community-led design, we are working to create an environment where those who have been excluded from traditional systems of care can find culturally responsive and gender-affirming care. A space where survivors who cannot or will not seek help elsewhere can access the healing and health care they deserve.

Planning any of our services and programming to include and center trans and gender diverse individuals is never an afterthought. It is deeply embedded within our values and will remain foundational as we continue to move forward. The last five years of the Meaningful Inclusion Project have taught us that inclusion is not just about adding policy - it is about reimagining entire systems. It is about creating safety, belonging, and healing on trans people's terms. It is about challenging dominant models of care and holding institutions accountable. It is about understanding culture not only in terms of heritage or ethnicity, but also through the lens of gender identity, community belonging, and lived experience.

Salal will continue to offer training and workshops to those who want to learn. We will continue to honour and uplift the queer and trans community, learn from missteps and hold ourselves accountable. We will continue to present data gathered from our Crisis Line and frontline staff to funders, leaders and the larger community to show the importance and urgency of this work. We will continue to hold systems accountable.

This Blueprint is not a checklist - it is a spark. A spark to shift how we understand inclusion, how we practice allyship, and how we design systems that welcome, reflect, and sustain trans and gender diverse lives. We offer it with deep respect and gratitude to all survivors and advocates who have shaped this work, and with a sincere invitation to all who engage with it.

**We hope that this Blueprint sparks an essential shift within the anti-violence sector, and we invite you to stand with us as we collectively work to create a world where all survivors are welcomed, supported, and held. A world where trans and gender diverse people can see themselves reflected, know that services have been created with them in mind, and feel that they truly belong.**

## Thank You

First and foremost, we thank the survivors who have and continue to trust us in providing support after experiencing sexualized violence. To those who have the strength and resilience to walk through our doors, share stories, and offer honest feedback: you have shaped this project into what it is today. Your voices are the heart of this work. Countless people have contributed to and shaped the journey of Salal's Meaningful Inclusion Project - to each and every person who took part, we are forever grateful.

A special thank you to Felix Gilliland, who led much of the Meaningful Inclusion Project. Their unwavering dedication to shifting the feminist sector and creating truly inclusive, safer environments for trans and gender-diverse people, who have long been excluded from these spaces, had a profound and lasting impact on our organization. Felix's care and commitment is felt in every corner of this work.

We are also deeply thankful to the many others who were instrumental in making this project possible, offering your wisdom, reflection, and commitment to change:

- Rebecca Rodriguez, Ph.D
- Ari Willis
- Vikki Reynolds
- The team at PACE Society, especially Kit
- Kai Cheng Thom
- Sonmin Bong
- Ariana Barer
- Dalya Israel
- PEERS Victoria
- Anti-violence workers from across the province
- Prince George Sexual Assault Centre (PGSAC) and Lynell
- Kate Rossiter at EVA BC

You have shaped this work, made it possible, and helped ignite a spark that we know will transform the sector.

From all of us at Salal, **thank you**.



# Appendix:

## Summary of Recommendations



# 1. Understanding the Current Social Conditions for Two Spirit, Trans, and Gender Diverse People

- Combat transphobia, transmisogyny and all forms of hate speech with the same commitment and strategy. Staff and volunteers can often draw from their existing skills in challenging other forms of hate to build confidence in addressing transphobia and transmisogyny. By applying a consistent approach across the organization, you strengthen your allyship and foster a culture of inclusivity. Regularly review your policies with staff and volunteers and ensure that they are current, effective and understood by everyone.
- Engage in activism that directly supports trans rights, whether through advocacy, policy change, or public education.
- Partner with community organizations to stand up against anti-trans rhetoric and hate speech.
- Be aware of the current political climate and how that can impact your queer and trans clients. Understand that they may want to discuss issues that may not fully fall within your mandate and allow time and space for this.
- Show up in community to be in solidarity with queer and trans survivors. Host or attend events that signal solidarity and safety. Building relationships will help you understand the three layers of harm in the ecological model specific to your location.
- Consider the context of harm when working with trans clients, particularly when discussing safety planning or engaging with other systems like hospitals or police, reflecting the realities of violence towards trans people in conversations will build trust.
- Utilize your social media platforms to uplift and support the trans community.

## 2. Shifting Organizational Conditions to Prevent Harm

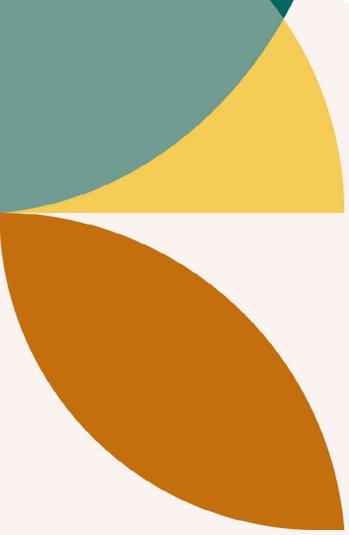
- Attend events in community to keep informed of what is happening within other organizations and sectors.
- Form working groups or committees if possible for internal work as well as external. Someone may have been on your journey before and can offer valuable insights; be proactive in starting dialogue across organizations, especially in your geographic area.
- Consult with staff and volunteers about policies and practices, obtain feedback and form plans to make changes if possible/as needed.
- Support frontline staff to respond to transphobia and transmisogyny, particularly in drop-in spaces, and create safer space policies for them to refer to.
- Develop a clear gender mandate that is not dependent on 'passing', and ensure that all staff can concisely describe it.
- Consistently review your partnerships and referrals. Offer support and conversation as appropriate to organizations you work with who may be trans exclusive or struggling with trans inclusion.
- Connect with other services in your area to better understand the landscape of support for trans and gender diverse people. Identify which services are affirming and which may not be. Use this information to create a resource or service guide your staff can use to refer survivors to safe and inclusive support.
- Ensure trans staff are not positioned to speak for all trans people. Their lived experience is valuable, but it must not become the default education tool for the organization.
- If changing the name of your organization (e.g., removing "women's centre") is part of your long-term inclusion strategy, consider waiting until substantial and visible work has been done. This prevents creating false signals of safety and avoids placing trans and gender diverse people in vulnerable or harmful situations.
- Consider the kinds of feedback you may receive along the way. Not all of it will be easy to hear - some may challenge your values, identity, or history as an organization. Prepare your team to hold this feedback with care, humility, and a commitment to change.

### 3. Healing from Sexual Violence for Two Spirit, Trans, and Gender Diverse People

- Engage with the communities you want to serve. What are their needs and how can you provide these services? How will you begin these conversations? Challenge your assumptions about what anti-violence services are.
- Build spaces that acknowledge the diversity of the trans community and can accommodate their needs. How will trans and gender diverse survivors see themselves reflected within your organization?
- Consider alternative forms of justice and healing. Are there transformative/restorative justice options in your area for survivors to access on their healing path? Can you create partnerships with other organizations offering this work?
- Gather and analyze client data and feedback ethically and with intention. The data will guide you on your journey to providing the best services for your clients.
- Be aware that trans survivors are not a monolith and will have very different priorities and goals for their healing journey. Recognize that healing is non-linear. Offer multiple entry points to your services and be open to survivors defining what healing means for them. This might look like peer support, creative expression, cultural reconnection, or harm reduction.
- Have knowledge of other organizations to refer clients to if needed. Sometimes your organization is the best referral, sometimes it's the first place people can contact and speak to a person. Know who can accept clients, what their mandates are and continuously check that these organizations are in alignment with yours.
- Build a network of partner organizations to lean on for support and resources. Some may have done work you want to do - no need to reinvent the wheel if the work has been done.
- Offer culturally specific and identity-affirming support. Ensure programming reflects the cultural, spiritual, and lived experiences of the communities you're serving. For many trans survivors - particularly Black, Indigenous, racialized and Two-Spirit people - healing may be most accessible through culturally grounded or community-led approaches.

## 4. Supporting Two Spirit, Trans, and Gender Diverse Staff in Anti-Violence Work

- Review the 2020-2024 Salal Annual Reports. The reports give a clear picture of the work, resources and results of the inclusion work over the last 4 years. It also touches on programming changes, creative fund development initiatives and insight on how the organization has navigated the shift to a more inclusive model in conjunction with a global pandemic.
- Salal offers Clinical Supervision (regular sessions with a counselor) to debrief and discuss the work. There is a high risk of vicarious trauma in frontline work of this nature and it is important to protect the mental wellbeing of your staff. If possible, consider implementing a similar system at your organization. Review the [linked document](#) for an overview of the program in place for Salal's frontline staff.
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# Glossary of Terms

For terms specific to queer and trans identities, please see:

[QMUNITY's Queer Glossary: A to Q](#)



**AFAB, AMAB, and gender assigned at birth:** When you are born, the doctors and staff will assign you a gender based on sex organs. Women are assigned female at birth (AFAB), men are assigned male at birth (AMAB). Gender is a social construct and peoples gender identity can change.

**Carceral feminism:** A feminist perspective which centers punishment through the criminal justice system, and is typically focused on increasing and enforcing carceral responses to violence against women. This perspective is frequently criticized for excluding communities, such as racialized communities and queer communities, who experience primarily harm from the criminal justice system.

**Cisgender:** Anyone who is not transgender or non binary; an adjective to describe anyone whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth.

**Consent:** to give permission for something to happen. Consent can also be revoked.

**Fragility:** Most often used in the context of antiracist praxis, this refers to feelings of discomfort or defensiveness when a white person is asked to address racism; the term can be borrowed to describe those feelings in a cis person when confronted with transphobia. Fragility often signals a shallow engagement with anti oppressive practice, wherein the feelings of those with privileged identities are prioritized over the practice of social justice.

**Hypersexualization:** Heightened focus on the sexuality of the subject, often as a means of objectification. Viewing entire communities through a lens of sexual curiosity.

**Internalized homo/ transphobia:** A queer or trans person's experience of applying biases to themselves, often resulting in feelings of shame. Internalized homo/trans phobia can be expressed in community when a person who experiences discrimination then applies that discrimination to others who share their identity.

**Lateral violence:** Violence that is enacted between members of the same disadvantaged communities, as an expression of discrimination or structural violence that comes from outside of that community.

**Minority Stress:** Cumulative stress resulting from discrimination. When applied to communities, minority stress can result in tactics like lateral violence and respectability politics.

**Nordic Model:** A legal framework which criminalizes the purchase of sexual services, but not the sale. This model is frequently criticized for contributing to stigma against sex workers and failing to provide safe working conditions.

**Out / outness:** The degree to which a person shares their sexual orientation or gender identity publicly or in different community spaces. There are important cultural considerations on the value and presentation of 'outness', and this framework is often criticized as centering White narratives of queerness.

**Passing:** In the context of transness, being understood as your correct gender in the world. The concept of passing is frequently criticized for upholding normative and Eurocentric standards of gender expression.

**Pathologization:** A set of beliefs that views 'otherness' as mental illness; in this case, the view that transness is a mental health concern, rather than a normal gender expression that is problematized by transphobia.

**Pronouns:** a word used to refer to someone or something when you do not need to use a noun. Examples: he, she, they, it. In the trans community, some people use neopronouns. Neopronouns are neologistic third-person personal pronouns that are beyond those already existing in a language. They replace he/she/they and are sometimes used by nonbinary people to more comfortably and accurately reflect their gender identity.

**Respectability politics:** A social movement strategy wherein groups will attempt to gain acceptance into the dominant culture by appealing to respectability, often at the expense of multiply marginalized groups and/or more controversial movement goals. An attempt to fit into dominant culture rather than shifting it.

**Sexual Assault:** In Canada, there is a somewhat broad definition. It includes all unwanted sexual activity (ex unwanted kissing, grabbing and rape). Sexual activity is only legal when all parties consent.

**Sociopolitical:** Interdependent social and political factors. This word signifies an understanding that social and political expressions are linked.

**Two-Spirit, or 2S:** An umbrella term used by many Indigenous communities on Turtle Island (so-called North America) to describe people with diverse gender identities, gender expressions, gender roles, and sexual orientations. Two-Spirit people were included and respected in most Indigenous communities, sometimes considered sacred and highly revered. They often took on important roles as healers, mediators, and warriors.

**Terf:** 'Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist'. This refers to individuals and branches of the feminist movement that are explicitly transmisogynistic, and organized around campaigning against trans rights. This ideology has deep roots in the violence against women sector.

**Transphobia:** A hatred or fear of trans people, or anyone who is seen as gender nonconforming. A reliance on or default to binary understandings of gender.

**Transmisogyny:** The intersection of transphobia and misogyny, which specifically refers to the experiences of trans women and trans feminine people. A common expression of transmisogyny is the false belief that trans women need to 'pass' or look like cis women in order to have their identity affirmed.

**Virtue-Signalling:** Expressions intended to align with a set of morals or values, often intended to position the speaker rather than make impact. 'Talking the talk'.

 **Salal** SEXUAL VIOLENCE  
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