1/1/2024

The Current and Future State of Gender Based Violence and Prevention in Nova Scotia

A Summary Report of the IWD Summit 2024 Hosted by Leeside Society & Be the Peace Institute

Prepared by Cora Cole

Contents

Land and Peoples Acknowledgement 3
Introduction and Framing 4
The “Why”—Why this, and why now? 4
The “What”—Summit Objectives 5
The “Who”—Summit Attendees 5
Participant Perspectives 6
Panelist Perspectives 7
Current and Future States of the GBV Ecosystem in NS 9
Strategic Conversations- Mapping the GBV Ecosystem in NS 9
Insights—Open Space Technology 11
Community Engagement: A Targeted Call to Action 13
GBV Innovation Lab 14
We Are Ready for Action 15
The Future State “A New Year, A New Era” 16
Future State of GBV Masculinity Work: Men + Boys 16
Future State of the "System" 17
Future State of Public Awareness Activities 17
Future State of Intervention and Prevention Efforts 17
Future State of Trauma-informed Therapeutic 18
Future State of Research and Report Dissemination 18
Future State of Working with the Private Sector 19
Conclusion 19
Call to Action Letters 19
Dear Government, Funders and Decision Makers 19
Dear Department of Community Services 20
Dear Academia 21
Dear Community Organizations 21
Participant Reflections 22
Day 1: What stood out for you today? 22
Day 2 What are you leaving with?- 23
Concluding Summary 24

Land and Peoples Acknowledgement

The summit referenced herein was held in beautiful Kespukwitk (Western Shore, Nova Scotia). The planning team and the organizations we represent are making continual, concerted efforts to unlearn and undo the ways in which white supremacy and racism show up in our policies, practices, and patterns of expression and behavior. We recognize the historical and ongoing legacy of colonialism is an act of violence that perpetuates to the present day and believe it is our collective responsibility, in a spirit of reconciliation, to help dismantle it. One of the respective changes we have made is to acknowledge the Inherent Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the beginning of all of our documents and reports. We held the summit in gratitude for and acknowledgement of our past, present and future elders. We also recognize here that:

- First Nations territories stretch to every inch of this province.
- Inherent rights, rooted in connection to lands and waters, have never been ceded or surrendered.
- Inherent rights are upheld in international, national, and provincial law.
- Long-standing Indigenous laws and systems are integrally tied to the lands and waters of these territories.
- Generations of Indigenous rights holders who are First Nations, Mi'kmaq, and Inuit from elsewhere in "Canada" also call these lands and waters home.

We also seek to recognize that many forms and forces of oppression are interconnected, and we must commit to freedom and justice for all peoples. Therefore, we also acknowledge the peoples of African descent as distinct peoples who, after arduous journeys of enslavement, settled in Nova Scotia 400 years ago and thrive in 52 communities across the province.

Introduction and Framing

The "Why"—Why this, and why now?

In the midst of an ongoing gender-based violence (GBV) endemic, there is a collective recognition that Nova Scotia (NS) sits on a precarious precipice demanding action and change. Specifically, the province faces a growing prevalence of GBV and other forms of oppression. This is not a question of next steps: we have the evidence and blueprints to begin making change today. It is not a matter of means: we have access to provincial and federal resources of unprecedented scale and scope. It is also not an issue of motivation: for everyone involved in NS GBV treatment and prevention, there is a great deal of momentum to act, and to act differently. Yet, despite this desire for change and action, incidents of GBV/IPV (Intimate Partner Violence) in the province have never been higher or more complex than they are now. How do we make change real, and fast?

Several recent landmark reports published in NS provide invaluable requisite evidence on evolving GBV prevalence/rates and recommendations for action:

- Restorative inquiry into the Nova Scotia Home for Coloured Children: Final Report
- The Mass Casualty Commission released its Final Report – Turning the Tide Together
- Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
- Nova Scotia Equity, and Anti-Racism Strategy
- The National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence
- The Desmond Fatality Inquiry
- WE REMEMBER: A report from the community for the inquest into the murders of Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam

These reports articulate this evidence of systems' failure to provide for people, standing on the shoulders of foundational reports and evidence that came before. They collectively document how communities and individuals in the province are being devastated by GBV and how we are still grieving, and still reeling. They outline calls to action and specific guidelines for achieving full-scale change, making indisputable recommendations that multi-sectoral collaboration and action is required—action for which frontline service providers throughout NS are advocating—to immediately ameliorate the endemic of GBV flourishing across our province. So, let us be clear: We do not have to study GBV in NS any longer. We need to invest in action now.

Sue Bookchin, Co-Founder & Executive Director opened the Summit with a moving introduction that set the tone and theme for the summit: "One in five NS children and youth live in poverty; one in three will be sexually abused before age eighteen. NS women are three times more likely to experience GBV than men, and there are higher rates of mental health issues, sexual exploitation of children and youth, transphobia, homophobia, misogyny, and GBV than ever before. And still, the media continues to glamorize male violence. Black and indigenous men and women are being over-policed and incarcerated. More indigenous children are in care now than there were children in residential schools. Community designated resources are dwarfed by the magnitude of the need. Affordable housing is hard to find. Food banks are turning away those in need. As individuals, we are burnt-out from trying to deal with global, social needs while bumping up against local systemic barriers and system-wide failures."

No one person or entity can move the needle alone. Real transformation happens by activating collaborative relationships and changing power dynamics. With this kind of collaboration in mind, and with project funding from the NS Status of Women Office, Leeside Society partnered with Be the Peace Institute to host a NS province-wide symposium summit aimed at examining the current state of NS GBV prevention activities and exploring future opportunities to amplify prevention efforts. An informal aim of the summit was to generate critical hope, together. Not blind hope that things will get better, but the actionable kind of hope that happens when we bear witness to suffering without turning away. Invigorating hope that fosters authentic relationships and inspires us to keep moving forward together.

The "What"—Summit Objectives

The theme of summit discussions was: "A New Year, a New Era: What are the opportunities? How will we move the needle?" As peer-based learning leads to improvements in the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals impacted by GBV and those who provide them support, the summit's Open Space Technology[1] agenda featured guest speakers on various GBV-related topics and strategic community conversations. The event aimed to:

1. Raise awareness and promote prevention.
   Create a space for needed peer review of recent landmark GBV research (including MCC recommendations) to make critical insights digestible and actionable.
2. Lay the pathway for action.
   Through accessible peer learning, help organisations and frontline individuals working across NS interpret new findings and move toward strategies for prevention and change.
3. Enhance support networks and resources.
   To have a direct impact on the care and service individuals receive, provide support for those addressing GBV in their work and create bi-directional opportunities for GBV frontline staff to learn about and share new programming ideas, identify collaborative programming opportunities, and access newly available resources.
4. Expand support capacity.
   Increase provider capacity to meet constituents' varied programming demands by creating a platform (time, resources, and opportunity) for collaboration opportunities, enhanced knowledge mobilisation, and coordinated conversations among service providers, researchers, funders and decision makers.

The "Who"—Summit Attendees

The two-day summit welcomed individuals with lived GBV experience and members of the broader GBV community, including but not limited to those working in academia, primary care and community service organizations, and government. The summit organising partners' combined province-wide connections and contacts to generate local, provincial and multi-sector attendee representation. And, to ensure learnings and insights on this important topic are accessible to all, the organizers worked with outside conference professionals to ensure accessibility and equity among participants.

[1] See page 10 for more information on the Open Space Technology philosophy and approach.

- 135 Thinkers, doers, supporters, funders and decision-makers attended on Day 1 and 125 on Day 2.

- 68 cross-industry organizations with representation from:
  - 5 academic/post-secondary institutions
  - All 3 levels of government
  - 1 hospital and 1 health authority
- 5 unique singers and storytellers whose relevant artistic contributions offered pause, reflection, and reprieve.

We herein recognize some basic assumptions for both the activities of the summit and the writing of this report:

- All participants who attended came to the summit with good intention.
- All participants spoke truth, without a hidden agenda.
- All participants were committed to preventing gender based violence.
- The summit, and the preparation of this report, may have been impacted by unintended biases given it was hosted and written by white, ciswomen. Despite being deeply rooted in working, supporting, studying, and leading violence prevention efforts, we as organizers recognize the inherent influence our own positionality has over these activities.

Participant Perspectives

To help all participants understand with whom they were sharing the space of the summit—and to recognize and acknowledge our own intersectionality and positionality—one of the first conversations held together was a collective sharing of positionality. This kickoff aimed to generate an atmosphere of vulnerability, trust, and comfort—one that would hopefully facilitate honest conversations throughout the rest of the summit. The following word cloud (Graphic 1) captures the result of this exercise.

Graphic 1: How Participants Described Themselves

Throughout the summit, given the highly personal and participatory nature of the event, focus area and activities, it was incredibly important to provide opportunities to capture qualitative (versus quantitative) participant feedback. Participants were asked throughout the two days to offer feedback in many forms: in dozens of breakout sessions, in “opening and closing circle” on both days, in "parking lot" flipcharts throughout the room, on sticky notes at every table, et cetera.

Participants appreciated—and felt safe within—the diverse and collaborative environment.
Participants emphasized the importance of networking opportunities and of learning from diverse voices to expand knowledge. They stressed the importance of community networking and reported fostering meaningful connections and forming new coalitions to address GBV. Most found panels informative and appreciated opportunities for formal presentations as collective learning opportunities. They valued insights from Black and Indigenous leaders, connecting with women in the sector, and collaborating with diverse stakeholders. They also highlighted the discovery of numerous rural organizations previously unknown to them. They acknowledged government's commitment to address GBV and learned about such ongoing efforts. Many participants had lived experience with GBV and most valued the safe environment so much they felt comfortable and inspired to contribute deeply personal stories; few did report being triggered by the conversations, learnings, and events of the day. Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of increasing understanding about transgender individuals. Overall, participants found the summit space—one in which personal stories could be comfortably shared and GBV-related issues safely discussed.

Participants valued the interactive and innovative format.
The facilitated and interactive format were praised for encouraging contribution and bi-directionality of conversations, fostering networking and learning, and bringing participants together as peers with influential figures. Integration of art into the program was a welcome and novel aspect; participants found the visual art powerfully conveyed messages, the singing was energizing, and the artistic components overall offered an experience for individual healing. Built-in opportunities for collaboration with diverse groups were noted for enhancing networking activity, fostering passion and purpose among attendees, and building solidarity felt throughout the event. Participants expressed a desire for ongoing communication channels between organizations to improve efficiency and effectiveness of direct service and planning.

Participants expressed collective frustration and concern, on behalf of the community.
Participants expressed concern about the prevalence of GBV in NS and the need for organizations at all levels to be innovative in their approaches to supporting those they serve. They also highlighted the pervasive nature of gender-based, Indigenous, and racial injustices, and lamented the limited opportunities for deep networking essential for advocacy campaigns. They expressed frustration with system operational policies hindering progress, observing a prevailing sentiment of helplessness towards changing the "system" overall, and admitted to having tangible fears about openly questioning and critiquing funders. Despite acknowledging progress in representation and openness about GBV, there was frustration over the slow pace of change and experiences of unkindness within the community. There is widespread burnout, and a sense of hopelessness among frontline-staff that needs to be addressed as soon as possible, if the current level of care is to continue.

Participants desired male and queer representation.
Participants noted the lack of male representation, and the absence of specific conversations/space for the queer community.

Panelist Perspectives

The summit hosted four formal panel discussions: one that focused on the system, and three dedicated

to specific sub-topics. Participants found panels informative and appreciated opportunities for formal learning from leaders and change-makers. One panellist attested to the fact that these sessions informed the discourse necessary to inspire action.

On Day 1, system stakeholders including Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard, Shawna Paris-Hoyt, Josie McKinney, and Jennifer Glennie (Associate Deputy Minister, Executive Council Office) who were asked questions relating to the community's persistent and systemic GBV issues, and how those gathered can help change the work being stewarded now. The three breakout panel conversations on Day 2 focused on: Transforming Justice, Cultural Responsiveness, and Family Matters & a Preventive Lens.

Top of mind for the Day 1 system panelists was the Mass Casualty Commission Report (MCC) and it's capturing of the nuances of GBV. Panelists noted their many hours spent listening and learning from Michael MacDonald's talk about the "violence pillar," and that the MCC report's implications went directly to the government's "central nervous system." They shared how the report prompted discussion at every government level about what to do now and what to do differently—with it ultimately being decided that the Executive Council Office (ECO), the structured and process-oriented "system behind the systems of government," would coordinate the response. This is unprecedented, and *a big deal*. As the ECO is seen as the "central nervous system" that can get people to work across different governmental departments, this fostered hope that the government response to the MCC will be real and meaningful.

However, the panel acknowledged and reminded us all that reports of today (e.g. the MCC, National Action Plan, and others) are standing on other important reports of yesterday (e.g. the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Marshall, Wortley Report, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP)—so, the interconnections of violence have been made known for a very long time, and all these reports mention the failure of systems to protect and prevent. The MCC may actually breathe life into inquiries that have started to collect dust, especially for Indigenous people. "Systems are working as they were designed to work"—designed within patriarchal and colonial systems to oppress—and systems change requires a lot of strategic buy-in that hasn't happened yet. Panelists discussed how the only way to change the systems in which we collectively find ourselves is to deconstruct those systems into day-to-day operations which function with more agility and responsiveness.

Panelists acknowledged that, human beings showed up and relived their trauma for the benefit of public education in all of these reports. *Therefore it is incumbent upon those within government to act in exchange for this learning, to change systems in real ways, or else all of this trauma has been relived for naught.* Along these lines, another important theme of discussion concerned the need to very intentionally create spaces for healing for those doing this work in often very hostile environments—especially members of vulnerable communities working in government spaces. Human needs are more complex and intersecting than ever before, and if we don't find/create systems, structures and time for support, frontline workers will burn out faster than we can teach, train and hire.

Individual, frontline staff have a wisdom, knowledge, expertise, and memory that *cannot* stay with one person alone; it must be somehow captured, so it can be passed along. More specifically, where these people are Black and Indigenous individuals working in colonial systems, they are often the only ones in the room—making it even more important that we capture and pass on their wisdom. The current system requires champions committed to ensuring the door is open and the room is welcoming for more individuals with lived experience, and especially Black and Indigenous voices, to enter the system; "champions like Sue Bookchin, who opened doors and created space for dialogue during the MCC". We also must start from the ground up and talk more about education and prevention, rather than top-down

intervention. The African Nova Scotian Justice Institute's opening of a new Division of Family Law & Child Welfare Issues may be an encouraging example of such initiatives; the Desmond Report gives good direction about what needs to happen next at the community level.

Another important theme of discussion concerned the fact that intersections of gender and sex make women more vulnerable to violence, requiring us to be more intersectional in our approach to prevention and incident support. Panel discussions suggested that governments are beginning to better understand intersectionality and positionality, and this should bring some hope. Without a doubt, there needs to be more creative leeway and agility for policy and implementation work within the system.

We also discussed how those in government—and "within the system"—must remain grounded by the communities they both participate in and represent. All must read the reports and pay attention to the recommendations. Those working within the system are in positions of privilege and power, and so have the responsibility to make change.

Key panelist takeaways were that systems' slow pace is frustrating, and conditions are more urgent now than ever before. *We need to do everything we can, now. We need to change the systems now.* As long as the system remains siloed, systemic change will never be realized, but platforms like this summit for cross-stakeholder learning and collaboration should bring hope and be repeated.

Senator Thomas Bernard has a plaque on her desk given to her by one of the organiser's students. It reads: "*The ancestors are moving mountains to see us rise."* All our ancestors who have been harmed by GBV want to see us to do better for future generations.

Current and Future States of the GBV Ecosystem in NS

Strategic Conversations- Mapping the GBV Ecosystem in NS

While tremendous community, governmental and academic efforts *are* underway to combat GBV, far too much of that work is siloed behind sector walls. In order to map all of what is currently happening—and what needs to happen—participants gathered around the following key categories, so that each might bring their respective piece of the puzzle to the group table. We brainstormed together about what a holistic, connected future state of gender-based violence prevention (GBVP) could look like:

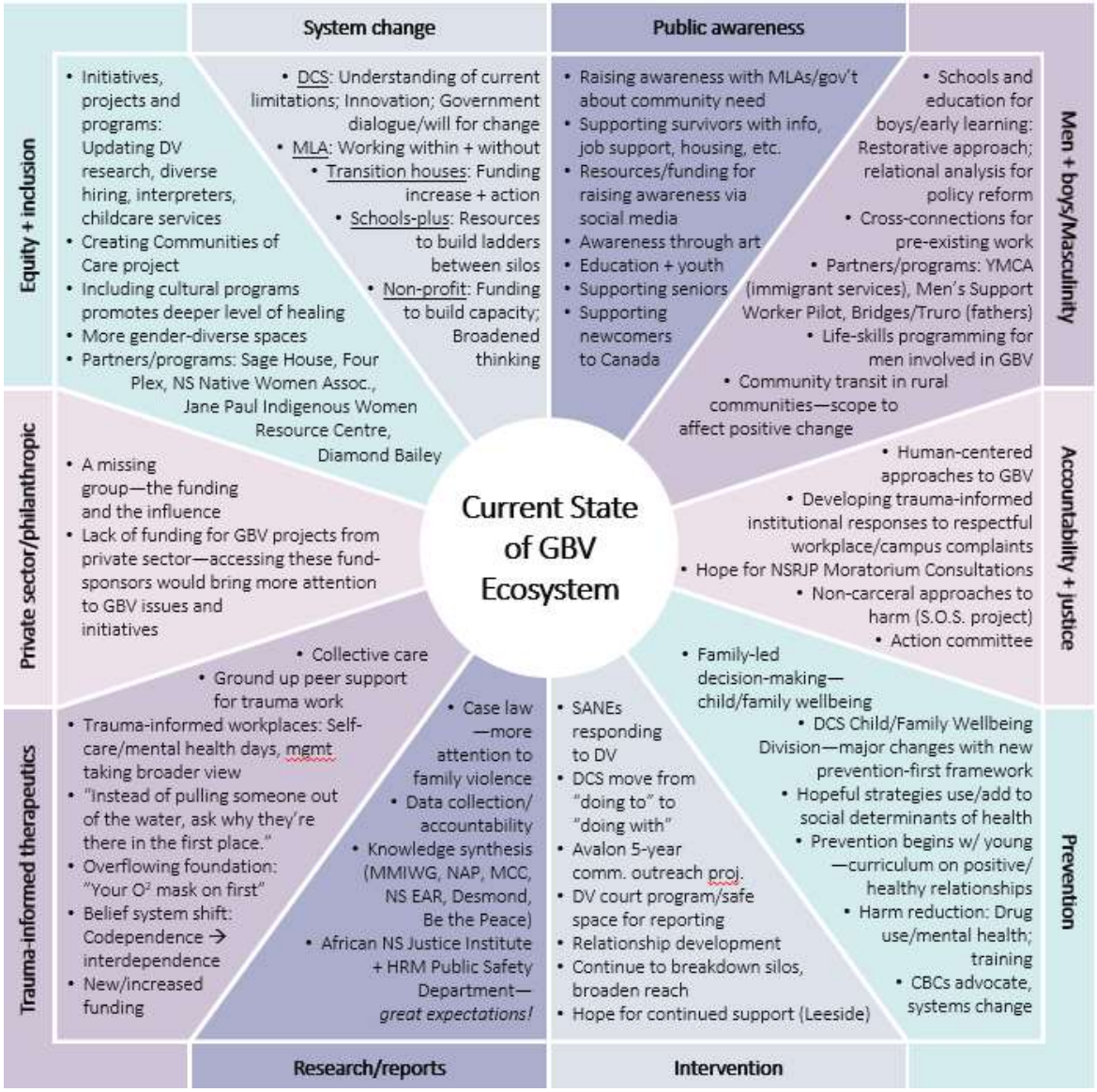
- Prevention, education, and social determinants of health (aka, the public health approach)
- Intervention and GBV response
- Therapeutic, trauma-informed, & longer-term recovery
- Accountability and justice
- Public awareness
- Equity and inclusion[2]

[2] Included specialized responses for all equity-deserving groups**:** ANS, Indigenous, migrant/newcomer, accessibility, gender diverse/non-conforming people, and more

- Working with men, boys, and masculinity
- Research and reports

By virtue of this collaborative exercise, participants reported that their small portion of the whole—the area of GBVP work they engage in every day—was expanded. Graphic 2 depicts the holistic ecosystem of ongoing NS GBVP activity, knowledge, priorities and goals that were mapped by virtue of these conversations.

Graphic 2: Current State Activities in the GBV Ecosystem Harvest



This dedicated time to connect the dots fostered broader ecosystem connection and created opportunities for collaboration and effort amplification. Critically, it also generated some of the hope that is needed to collectively propel us through our vital and difficult day-to-day work in this area. While Graphic 2 highlights the current state, *funders and decision-makers take note*: a reoccurring thread across

all these conversations alluded to the concrete, ecosystem-wide, progress that could be made reality sooner with (a) additional funds, and (b) more opportunities to similarly collaborate.

Insights—Open Space Technology

"Open Space Technology" (OST) is a strategic group meeting methodology, developed in the late 1980s by Harrison Owen and now utilized around the world as an effective process for facilitating change in both organizational and community settings. Purpose is to unearth the wisdom in the room, honour the intelligence among the participants rather than deferring to "experts or leaders", and to harvest the topics of most importance to them. Its *no-predetermined-agenda* model creates conditions for interactive processes that allow leadership to surface naturally, and are proven to enable the building of group energy and participation in ways that few other models can or do.

Guiding principles that make OST particularly effective with multi-sectorial work are as follows:

1. Whoever comes are the right people—The wisdom to achieve solutions is present in the room. A group need not concern itself with who is, or is not, present.
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened—Attention should stay on the best possible effort in the present. A group need not worry about what should have been done.
3. Whenever it starts is the right time—Creativity cannot be controlled. A group's energy flows both during and between formal sessions.
4. When it's over, it's over—Discussions should continue so long as there is energy for them. Some will finish well within their anticipated time. Others will run longer than the time allotted.

We applied the OST model to sessions during the summit in order to help further break down GBVP activity silos and systemic barriers to ending GBV. Themes of discussion that consequently emerged were: What's possible here? What is the path to greater collaboration?

Along these lines, participants raised 12 topics to be used as the focus for small group summit discussions. Notes from each Day 1 conversation were compiled and shared overnight, to serve as a resource for Day 2 action planning, and notes from Day 2 conversations were consolidated into informal reports. In order to gauge collective perspective on next-step interest and urgency, participants were asked to use the reports to triage the conversation topics by participating in a "dotmocracy." Table 1 summarizes the consensus on priorities for action that emerged from this exercise.

Table 1: Priorities for Action

Additional insights from this topic are found on page 12-13

OST Conversation Topic	Dotmocracy Results	Action Notes
Implementing policy at all levels of government	11	– Connecting with others in government – Highlighting community work – Correctional facility approval access, to meet with clients – Sexual violence harassment with OH – Resources: Lisa P. Talbot, YMCA report, CCC org (long-term funding)
Housing and gender	9	– Social housing as a responsibility of government

equality		– Mental health care – IA rates – Non-market option – Rent control – Collaboration between government & NPOs

Better connecting DCS (Dept of Comm Serv.) with the community*	9	– Ongoing conversations with community, community partners, in a variety of capacities, e.g.:
		  – DCS staff drop-in Q&As at community meetings,
		  – Well-planned sessions with interpreters
		  – DCS at Community Circle meetings (roundtable)
		  – More HUBB meetings
		  – Lunch & learns with community partners
		– Critical components of effective communication/connection:
		  – Accessibility (interpretation/sign/boundary free)
		  – Advance notice
		  – Leveraging accessible technology
		– Education for newcomers around how the DCS systems work
		– More focus on meeting families' needs efficiently—no family turned away
		– Shifting to quick support/system navigation
		– Stronger links between protection, prevention, and early intervention
		– "Can DCS develop a mode like 211? It's amazing!"

Working with—not against—cultural differences	9	– Avoiding outside interpreters (bias/not understanding feminist or queer terms) and hiring multilingual workers – When serving women, bringing *thoughtfully selected* female workers (victim blaming between women) – Combatting shame with objective facts, laws and Canadian policy – For some immigrants, "parenting" doesn't stop at age 18.
Creating new, safe, *non-punitive* spaces to report/seek help	8	– Creating a task group to explore ideas for implementation – Continuing to explore alternatives to mandatory changing policy, per MCC recommendation
Harm reduction strategies and innovation	8	– More funding for what is happening now (i.e. cigarettes on hand to de-escalate)
Education and prevention (with a youth focus)	6	– Multi-pronged approaches – Presence of "safe adults" for hard conversations – Agile, outside-the-box solutions (i.e. can happen anywhere)
Pro-arrest policies—What's next? What do survivors need?	6	– Police/RCMP training on IPV (identifying risks/violence) – Trauma-informed and survivor choice approaches – Police recruitment policies (who are being recruited?) – Policies more considerate of the survivors they impact
Fixing *everything* by preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences	5	– Promo video explaining ACEs (for distribution in ERs, doctor offices) – Mandatory financial investment in prenatal care/prevention – Eradicating childhood poverty—leverage school system
"She Should Run!" - Upcoming and future municipal elections	4	– Need for mentors willing to let women know what is in store if they choose to run
GBV Innovation Lab—	4	– Need donors/funders to work with

Building a structured system in NS*		– Turning knowledge into action – Enabling knowledge transfer across sectors/generations
Transition of transition houses	3	– Stepping back: Dismantling and restructuring systems no longer working – Household coordinator role – More communication/best-practice sharing between shelters
Intergenerational teaching	3	– THANS hiring an Education/Prevention Coordinator, to work Trans Houses' harm reduction policy
Art and creativity for healing	2	– Reaching out within communities to create space – Meeting people where they are (with community consultation) – Creating more intergenerational spaces
Collective care and burnout prevention	1	– Process for ethical decision-making (i.e. Code of Ethics) – Space to work through/recognize the emotion around the work – Mental health days without judgement
Creating safe spaces in the community		– Funding/policies for creating more safe spaces, communities of care – Storytelling for healing

Community Engagement: A Targeted Call to Action

Epitomizing one of the advantages of the free conversation OST model, several of the above insights both resist the labels of any single category and warrant targeted attention. One such "Eureka" insight pertained to the question of community engagement—specifically, how the Department of Community Services (DCS) could better engage and connect with community members (spanning the linked community work and policy implementation categories). This topic generated many important action ideas, which we present here.

What community engagement could look like

In response to the idea/question of what community engagement looks like—or could look like—in response to MCC, participants provided insights on priorities and action items pertaining to two main themes: the people involved, and the critical components of process.

People

- *Engage across sectors:* Encourage/facilitate involvement from diverse sectors.
- *Remunerate:* Ensure fair compensation for participants involved in the engagement.
- *Reciprocate:* Give back to the community by addressing their needs and concerns.
- *Ensure representation* by those most impacted by ideas being addressed.
- *Build readiness:* Prepare communities for engagement through education and awareness.
- *Address harms:* Acknowledge and address past harms or betrayals, to rebuild community trust.
- *Prioritize inclusivity:* Ensure representation of all voices, including those marginalized or silenced.

Process

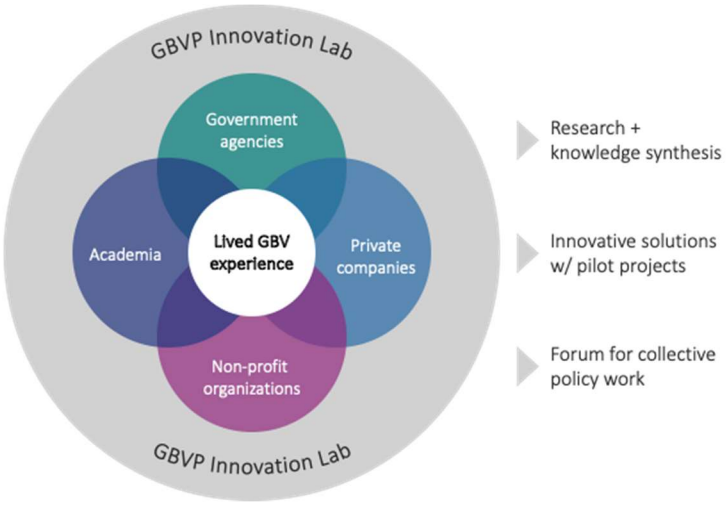
- *Clarify purpose:* Clearly define the objectives and goals of the engagement process.
- *Be responsive:* Respond to process and adapt as needed, but hold clear reporting/action deadlines.
- *Be transparent* about what is achievable/feasible, within the engagement process and beyond.
- *Be flexible:* Utilize flexible formats and venues to accommodate diverse community needs.
- *Be humble:* Acknowledge limitations of knowledge/expertise, and refrain from assuming answers.
- *Interrogate assumptions:* Challenge existing beliefs and assumptions to foster critical thinking.

- *Build trust:* Establish trust within communities through transparency and integrity.
- *Create safe spaces:* Create safe/welcoming environments, including trauma-informed approaches.
- *Employ restorative practices* to resolve conflicts and address harms.
- *Map the ecosystem:* Map out the broader context and connections within the community.
- *Sequence and revisit:* Allow for revisiting of topics/issues to ensure comprehensive understanding.
- *Address conflicting agendas:* Plan for/manage conflicting priorities/agendas within the process.

GBV Innovation Lab

Participant perspectives also coalesced around the concept of establishing a dedicated social change lab focused on addressing GBV in NS. Such a concept would build on the momentum created by the summit and the most recent set of GBV report recommendations and the National Action Plan for Canada [NAP-CAN], and would address/work within the sector challenges of limited resources and collaboration.

This lab would serve as a collaborative platform for organizations to pool resources and expertise, ensuring the requisite representation and contributions of diverse perspectives needed to tackle GBV most efficiently, most effectively, and at a more rapid pace. In other words, it would function as a trusted, independent host for the partnerships needed between the many various sectors and stakeholders involved in GBVP, including private companies, government agencies, academia, non-profit organizations and, importantly, those with lived GBV experience.



Practical activities the lab could undertake include:

- Conducting research and knowledge synthesis on GBV issues.
- Identifying innovative solutions, and implementing pilot projects to test these solutions in real-world settings.
- The lab could also serve as a forum for collective policy work, advocating for changes that will address systemic issues contributing to GBV today.

Importantly, as envisioned, the lab would prioritize transparency, accountability, and inclusivity. It would actively seek input from affected communities and ensure their voices are heard and represented in actionable decision-making processes.

To make this idea a reality, funding and resources to establish and sustain the lab would be needed in both the short- and long-term. To meet its goals, the lab would require access to the valuable insights and guidance experts like those in government, justice, education etc. In short, by establishing a social change lab dedicated to GBV, organizations would be able to work together more efficiently and effectively to address this pressing issue and create meaningful change in their communities.

We Are Ready for Action

Day 2 of the summit was all about identifying concrete, actionable next steps. Inspired by panelists and output from prior OST-designed discussions. Participants self-formed follow-on discussions about what working groups *would or could do* to immediately to begin tackling progress toward the real system changes needed and identified.

Seven groups met. Each identified a clear goal/purpose/mission, and identified next steps and responsibilities. Some groups even went so far as to identify resources needed to take action. Table 2 highlights the outcomes of these action-orientated conversations.

Table 2: Action Groups

	Goal, purpose, or mission	Clear next steps	The "how"	Resources required
Regular sector collaboration	Tackle engagement challenges: De-isolate, encourage cross-org collaboration, and make time for wellness/mental health support	– Build community of action – Identify self-care resources – Coordinate & attend monthly meetings	– Continue conversation online, starting immediately – Start small—quicker to focus when busy	– Mental health resources – Funding
Engagement of child protection/ community partners	Facilitate open dialogue and conversations between families, community and Child Protection	– Implement family group conference – Pride training / Gold Standard / Priority Kids – Informed counsel	– Online follow-up conversation to begin work	
Creation of equal representation legislation	Have equal representation legislated in NS	– Discussion: What is legislation? How does it affect us? – Get community partners to the table (i.e. School Plus) – Plan province-wide strike – Find empathetic MPs	– Online to start	– Legislation experts – people to promote the message
Education	Use education as a prevention tool	– Building trust with schools (admins + parents) and community partners – Knock off outcomes for teachers – Break down silos	– Email and Zoom	– Engagement of school stakeholders (admins, parents, etc.)
Incorporation of harm reduction into transition house policy	Incorporate harm reduction into transition house policy	– Create a tailored policy for each house	– Process/policy development	– People resources – Funding – Training/

				education
Helping men + boys	Helping men + boys (awareness, engagement and support)	– Create 1-pager – Distribute to sports teams & org. coaches to raise awareness of efforts	– Online and Zoom	
GBV accountability measure	Create sector accountability to justify work	– Have accountability built into processes, working groups – Decrease risk of speaking up/funding consequences – Stop using De-weaponized confidentiality	– Normalize safe-enough space, and risk taking	

Participants left the summit with names and contact details for those keen to start working in specific areas/work streams.

The Future State "A New Year, A New Era"

Thanks to the recent reports conversations held at the summit, we no longer have a reason to ask, "What can be done?" We know already. We have validated and documented the current endemic levels of GBV. The question that remains is, "When can we start?" Part of the summit was to come together to agree upon goals and develop clear, de-siloed next steps—as we assemble resources and look to the future—the inspiring question ahead of us becomes, "What can the future look like, if we take action today?"

Based on the outcomes of cross-representational summit discussions, the following sections summarize specific, tangible actions that could be taken immediately to drive progress.

Future State of GBV Masculinity Work: Men + Boys

When schools and early learning institutions implement more robust support systems for boys, it helps ensure their holistic development and wellbeing. With this in mind, there's a growing recognition of the need for more *cross-connections* and *relational analysis* within the education to reform policies addressing GBV.

With additional funds, restorative approaches become standard practice in NS schools, leading to more inclusive policies and a deeper understanding of GBV for all students. Among many examples, a sample of immediate actions could include:

- YMCA Immigrant Services further expanding/enhancing programs for immigrant men and boys, fostering stronger cultural responses to GBVP.
- The Men's Support Worker Pilot program growing and integrating into more support service platforms, for men facing challenges.
- The Bridges (and similar initiatives) developing comprehensive support structures for fathers, emphasizing the power of parenting and life-skills development.

Future State of the "System"

In an improved future for NS, much-needed GBVP efforts that aim to foster safety, empowerment, and inclusivity within communities are no longer one-off programs, but integrated system-wide initiatives. Specialized responses are able to crucially address marginalized populations previously overlooked. With increased, sustainable funding, many stakeholders are empowered to effectively engage in this connected GBVP platform, and immediate impacts could include:

- Non-profit organizations (including Schools Plus, women's centres, and transition houses), no longer having to compete for resources, undertaking proactive measures to better serve their communities—moving from helping clients survive, to helping them *thrive*.
- MLAs increasing advocacy for and enacting policies to address systemic issues, both within and outside of government structures.
- Trauma-informed institutional responses being established in all publicly-funded organizations, leading to more respectful workplaces and improved complaint handling.
- A committed, human-centered approach becoming the norm in addressing GBV, ensuring that survivors' voices are central to all efforts and interventions.
- DCS spearheading innovative systemic changes with government support.

Integrated program models like the "Creating Communities of Care" project and Sage House initiatives—focused on researching domestic violence, enhancing workplace diversity, providing safe spaces, and implementing cultural responsivity—could be strong examples to replicate.

Future State of Public Awareness Activities

When public awareness-raising efforts take a multifaceted approach to addressing holistic societal need, youth are educated, seniors are supported, and survivors of GBV are empowered with information and resources. We must move to a future state in which such awareness work is no longer a responsibility left to frontline workers—where *the responsibility to "educate up" is not piled on those already handling real-world GBV fallout every day.*

Reorienting and redirecting resources/responsibilities is a specialized skill that deserves and requires dedication of time and support. In other words, we can foster greater understanding and inclusivity by appropriately reorienting and supporting critical responsibilities. Immediate priorities could include:

- Engaging with legislators and government officials to highlight community needs—and responsibilities thusly deserving of redirection.
- More effectively reaching diverse and targeted audiences through redirected communication resources/funding, dedicated to leveraging social media and other awareness platforms.

Future State of Intervention and Prevention Efforts

As the saying goes, we must ask why someone is in the water instead of just pulling them out. That is, in a culture where we prioritize understanding problems' root causes, we can better address them in the now and prevent them from reoccurring in the future. Achieving this proactive kind of support across organizations fosters a belief system that values mutual support and collective wellbeing.

When we realize a model that prioritizes intervention and prevention, immediate impacts could include:

- *Workplace*: Managers consider underlying issues when employees exhibit signs of exhaustion or silence; rather than prompting judgment, and where mental health days are considered acceptable for maintaining wellbeing.
- *Government*: Departments like DCS transitioning from a model of "doing to" to one of "doing with"—fostering more collaborative and community-driven initiatives.
- *Collaboration* across sectors continuing to expand, resulting in more holistic support systems that preventatively address the diverse needs of individuals and communities affected by GBV.

Future State of Trauma-informed Therapeutics

As collaboration across sectors continues to expand, we achieve more holistic support systems that address the diverse needs of individuals and communities affected by GBV. Specifically, building on the "doing with" model, we realize the opportunity to trauma-inform many more areas of GBV support. Immediate impacts could include:

- The practice of integrating Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) into GBV response becoming more widespread, ensuring survivors receive specialized care regardless of the nature of assault.
- The completion of the Avalon 5-year community outreach project leading to sustained awareness and utilization of services, contributing to long-term community wellbeing.
- Continued support for services provided by organizations like the Leeside Society ensuring ongoing assistance for those in need, and promoting resilience within communities.
- Increased emphasis on critical reflection leading to enhanced wellbeing and job satisfaction among professionals in the field, ultimately improving survivor outcomes.
- The DV Court Program and safe reporting spaces evolving to better meet the needs of survivors, providing comprehensive support while respecting autonomy and choice.
- The HRM Public Safety Department meeting or exceeding expectations, resulting in enhanced public safety and community wellbeing.
- The African Nova Scotian Justice Institute fulfilling its great expectations, leading to improved access to justice and outcomes for African Nova Scotian individuals and communities.
- Strong, trusting, informed relationships with youth being further strengthened, potentially fostering valuable youth leadership and involvement in decision-making processes.

Future State of Research and Report Dissemination

Continued attention to family violence in case law—combined with a streamlined and enhanced information/data processing approach—leads to more robust legal responses and protections for survivors and their families, including:

- System data and information being more effectively scrutinized. "We cannot understand what we cannot see."
- Data collection and accountability measures being strengthened, resulting in more effective interventions and support for GBV survivors, and improved accountability within the justice system.
- Additional knowledge synthesis efforts contributing to more informed policies, programs, and services, ultimately leading to better outcomes and experiences for affected communities.
- Evaluations becoming transparent, and being shared for all to learn from. "GBV doesn't happen in a silo, so why do evaluations?"

Future State of Working with the Private Sector

Now is the time to unlock as yet untapped private sector funding for GBV projects—as private sector sponsors could significantly elevate/mainstream awareness of GBV issues *and* amplify efforts to combat them within their organizations and their communities at large. Mobilization of efforts to engage with private sector funders could include highlighting the importance of investing in GBV projects and the transformative impact private support could have on individuals and communities. Together, we can ensure that GBV receives the attention and resources it deserves, ultimately creating a safer and more equitable society for all.

Conclusion

Call to Action Letters

Viable and practical recommendations for taking actionable steps to combat GBV and support prevention efforts can be found throughout this report. To further support the consensus that the time to act against GBV is now, we wanted to do something different than end with a typical conclusion and corresponding number of recommendations. Instead, we wanted to capture the momentum and passion that was evident in each conversation and *advance* the call for change by drafting call to action letters. Each of the following letters are addresses to members of the GBV sector, with the hope that genuine action can be taken more quickly.

Dear Government, Funders and Decision Makers

We appreciate your effort, but your system is broken across all sectors. Without a doubt, your responses provided over the last several decades are not working: the cracks are only widening, *despite* frontline workers' heroic, innovative and largely unrewarded efforts to bridge gaps for their clients. You are failing your clients, the staff who work in the GBV sector, and GBV survivors themselves, and it is past time to stop the competition for siloed resources among community partners and peers, e.g. poaching staff, creating pitch competitions for temporary project funding. Asking us to compete for government funding only serves to perpetuate the notion of scarcity which forced us to build up our silos in the first place.

By virtue of working within the system, you are in positions of privilege and power, and so have the responsibility to make change. So, we are urging you to respond to the pressing needs articulated by community partners within this document. *Your immediate actions can include:*

- Increasing opportunities for participation and ongoing communication channels between organizations, to enhance service efficiency and effectiveness. (I.e., Investing in collective communication pathways and facilitating cross-sector collaboration opportunities.)
- Reforming operational policies currently hindering progress—particularly regarding funding and program evaluation—with us at the table.
- Innovating your approaches to addressing Gender-Based Violence and Prevention (GBVP) via a focus on collaboration, dissemination of information, and understanding the needs of transgender individuals.
- Taking immediate action to address burnout and feelings of hopelessness among frontline staff.

- Trauma-informing systems by embracing grassroots perspectives and making way for individuals with lived experience to take a seat at the table, and implementing trauma-informed responses across all publicly-funded organizations.
- Fostering cross-connections in education.

Specifically, there is a desire and a gross need for an independent, non-governmental, non-academic, non-community GBV platform. Nova Scotia needs a GBVP innovation hub or centre of excellence to track and drive meaningful cross-silo progress *now*.

During the panel discussion at our summit, you asked for insights, ideas, and actions. Here you go. You also said you can't change the system without us—we have, at the ready, names and emails of people who signed and proposed the above solutions. We promise you: undertaking these and related actions will serve to create informed policies, programs, and services that lead to tangibly better outcomes for our shared community.

Dear Department of Community Services

The relationship between us is long-standing and complex. Is it *love-hate? Co-dependent?* Perhaps. But it remains a critical relationship for us both. Energy and momentum from our summit calls for tangible action on several key initiatives aimed at improving our dialogue, our relationship, and, consequently, our community's access to essential services. As representatives of various sectors and community organizations within Nova Scotia—all with the same, shared purpose to prevent GBV—we believe the following actions are essential for fostering inclusivity, accessibility, and efficiency between us:

1. Foster ongoing conversations: Ensure continuous dialogue with community members across diverse capacities, valuing their input and perspectives in decision-making processes.
2. Prioritize accessibility: Make services easily accessible to everyone by providing interpretation and sign language support, and by removing physical barriers.
3. Improve advance notice communications: Provide clear and timely communication to community partners, ensuring all are well-informed of upcoming events, changes, or initiatives.
4. Utilize technology for two-way communication: Implement accessible technology to facilitate open communication with community partners, ensuring their voices are heard and respected.
5. Educate newcomers on DCS systems: Offer comprehensive education for newcomers, translating information on protection services and available support into relevant languages.
6. Increase DCS staff presence at community meetings: Encourage DCS staff to participate in community gatherings, offering opportunities for Q&A sessions and planned discussions with interpreters.
7. Expand HUBB meetings: Increase the frequency of HUBB meetings to enhance community comfort and knowledge, and address needs more effectively.
8. Reinstate lunch & learn sessions: Bring back lunch & learns to facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration among community partners.
9. Enhance focus on efficient family support: Prioritize efficient support systems to meet families' needs promptly and effectively.
10. Streamline support and navigation: Ensure swift access to service via expedited support processes and simplified system navigation.
11. Strengthen links between protection, prevention, and early intervention: Foster stronger connections between different service sectors to ensure comprehensive support for families in

need.

12. Foster community engagement through circle meetings: Encourage DCS involvement in community circle meetings to promote inclusive and collaborative decision making.
13. Explore developing a DCS-specific mode, similar to 211: Investigate the feasibility of creating a dedicated mode for accessing DCS services, inspired by the successful 211 model.
14. Promote relationship-based approaches: Embrace the "small-town" ethos of relationship-based work to enhance trust and collaboration within the community.
15. Ensure safe spaces for conversation: Guarantee that clients and community members have safe, supportive environments in which to discuss their needs and concerns.
16. Educate and engage diverse communities: Reach out to various communities—including religious, ethnic, and newcomers—to raise awareness and facilitate conversations about available community services, similar to efforts made for the African Nova Scotian community.

By taking action now on these initiatives, we can build stronger, more inclusive communities in which *everyone* has access to the support and resources they need to thrive.

Dear Academia

Help us. Work with us, to articulate, evaluate and evolve the system that is perpetuating gender-based violence. Let us turn your theories into action.

One of the things that became clear during our summit was that all of us involved in GBVP are not using the same language, whilst all of our perspectives are important and impact action. The community sector talks about intersectionality, positionality, prevention, and support. Government talks about interventions, outcome, equitable access, and population programming. Sometimes, for each stakeholder group, each topic has multiple different meanings depending on the gender, race, ethnicity and age of the speaker. If we don't recognize these subtle but significant language differences for what they are, we risk spinning our wheels—perpetuating unintended micro aggressions/misunderstandings/ misalignments and an "us versus them" mentality that hinders action and sustains current levels of mistrust. Perhaps, from your world of expertise, research and theory, you could help articulate paths forward. Perhaps one initiative that needs to happen in order to bridge a cross-factorial point of view is the creation of a gender-based violence dictionary: a liveable document that captures respective interpretations of words and phrases to help us increase understanding across communities, build trust, and solidify relationships prerequisite for taking action.

Academia, would you not agree that data is just data—it can never be information—until it is put into its context? You have the data. We are the context that will change your data into action. We are the dissemination strategies your research funders want you to find. And so, we implore you to stop looking at us like research subjects and invite us to your tables as equals. Together we can powerfully synthesize knowledge to contribute to better informed policies, programs, and services, ultimately leading to better outcomes and experiences for affected communities. Please review the lists of actions included throughout this report and let us know which mutually beneficial opportunity for change we can tackle together.

Dear Community Organizations

We see you. We heard you. You are not alone. We know you trusted this summit to hold space for all *you*

are holding onto—both problems and solutions—and we have done our best to curate what you have shared.

As evidenced throughout these pages, if any overarching insight emerged from our joint conversations, it is that this type of *collective* conversation is critical on many levels. It's critical to release the pressure building at this gasket. It's critical to bring together peers doing similar work, facing the same crises and trying to reach shared solutions. It's critical for enabling peer learning and support, for allowing us to listen to and teach each other. It allowed all of us to connect, and know we are not working alone.

Another key observation that emerged from the summit is that there are communities within community. We often, and importantly, consider divisions of race, ethnicity, and gender, but one sub-community less often talked about is the community created by virtue of our age. Specifically, there are perceptions that some individuals are being excluded from conversations because of their age bracket. For example, we know from the summit that youth don't feel heard: that you feel ignored, that you feel like you have solutions and ideas for change, but no one is listening. On the other side, there are people who are mid-career working hard to fill the gaps, build bridges, save clients, hold and create space for everyone, while also coordinating the "feeding of the funders," implementing solutions and applying for more funds to give action to the ideas that the youth are coming up with; they are playing the roles of both farmer and firefighter, and they are getting tired. And then, there is a collection of more experienced individuals (both those with lived experience, and those who have spent their entire career in the GBVP field) with decades of solutions experience and corporate memory, who no longer feel they have a voice at the tables either.

The great, unfortunate irony? Each of these groups wants the same outcomes. While age is acting like just another silo in the way, there is the opportunity for untapped synergy if we can find a way to all work effectively together. Those that would fall into the youth category are full of needed energy, zest, and determination to do things differently. The group in the middle are strong and compassionate, with the skills to support others through a crisis while balancing resource management. The third group is holding onto wisdom and insights that can only be gained through experience. If we can find a way, together, to tap into all of these three perspectives among ourselves, the scale and pace of progress toward ending gender-based violence will be unmatched.

We are already lobbying for next year's summit and we will need you there. So please, between now and then take care, get rest, and where and when possible, kick at the walls of silos surrounding your work and collaborate. Let's get together and talk again soon.

Participant Reflections

Throughout the two days, participants genuinely shared, taught and learned from and with each other. Questions called during the Open Space Technology revealed both strengths and vulnerabilities. So it is fitting that we end the report by sharing some direct participant feedback.

Day 1: What stood out for you today?

"So many government and policy systems that create barriers to the work."

"People found new partners in the room that can help them with their work."

"There was so much support from every group visited, so many movers and shakers."

"In all of the groups, a lot of the conversations, there is recognition of the work people are doing in 'their corner of the puzzle' and what comes out of a day like this, is more days like this. Having the ability to collaborate and share is at the heart of the work, but there needs to be space for us to rest and focus on this."

"It can be difficult for social support workers with intercultural backgrounds, but give yourself grace. We need to listen how clients would like to be serviced."

"Power of collaboration and sharing of collective knowledge."

"I want everyone to consider their definition of 'gender-diverse' to ensure you include everyone under that umbrella as you open up your resources to gender diverse persons."

"Things are already happening—coming into this room and hearing people talking about these things today shows movement in this area."

"If you have younger staff or frontline workers, I urge older persons to focus on them and help them/support them because we're coming in with only similar degrees, but different sociological, political, etc. backgrounds."

"As a young person, one of the things that came up in our circles is having those spaces to have intergenerational conversations like these. This helps us to talk with persons and learn so much we never would have gotten otherwise."

"What is underneath the systemic issues? How do we name them? Awareness, Acceptance and only then action."

"We need safe spaces for frontline workers, supporting this work, to get support ASAP because our frontline workers will burn out—system support is essential."

"The intention of the work to end GBV must align with all the reports: MMIWG2S+, final report 231, calls of justice, TRC, Donald Marshall Inquiry, Desmond Inquiry, and MCC."

"We cannot work in silos to end GBV—importance of collaborations among organizations."

"People are showing up, no longer alone—all women at the tables."

"Need to emphasize prevention; we could do better, such as in the justice system, to make changes. Culturally responsive support services."

"Who is here, and should be here. Keep them in mind when considering to be more inclusive."

"Keep supporting one another."

"We are community and this is not the end."

Day 2 What are you leaving with?-

"So much has changed in 10 yrs, people sharing stories and so much more inclusive."

"I have hope and inspiration that the needle is moving."

"Thank you, a privilege to be here; diversity, cross sector; not shocked by GBV stories sadly, hope is that there is follow up after reporting – from police for ex, how did we do, what were the gaps…; It is sad but likely true an African Nova Scotian or an Indigenous or Immigrant might not survived a similar experience?"

"Singing workshop really helped me, I work in a crisis environment and have vicarious trauma, I feel like I was holding my breath for so long, I am breathing."

"Work with women with trauma since I was 18, police/support…, it all weighs me down, self-care is needed and I advise that to my clients but it is hard to do myself, I find comfort in ceremony."

"Sometimes I am not included, or not many indigenous are included, or we are the 'token Indian.' Wish we had more representation here, especially on panels. Denise Malloney from MMIWG. Mi'kmaw Family Leaders Centre. We are more likely to go missing, to be murdered, treated like garbage. Yet it is not on the news. Police need to do better, don't take seriously or victim blame. Scared for our women."

"Creating Communities of Care grassroots work to address this, no colonial system involvement."

"No more violence. Want to see society understand it and change it. Almost so little has changed. I am 80."

"As a white women experience abuse, courts… I was treated like a perp, can only imagine how racialized women are treated. Can change incrementally in each of our practice, story sharing, healing. Need to stop the generational trauma. Stories make us pause and und the humanness of it. Sharing leads to change."

"Privileged to hear what is happening. Have energy for activism. It is an energy gain and drain. Can we just agree to change? Collectively."

"Basic income for all."

"Who are the decision makers, they're not here. Look at Iceland—work strike led to change in legislation."

"Yesterday gave me hope. A recent incident was very isolating. As an immigrant didn't know what to do. Now I know what to do and where to seek support. Lots of trauma and abuse over generations – imagine if my family had these connections."

"Takeaway: a strong and detailed feeling… but hard to articulate the depth and breadth of community knowledge here (and some are missing). Need space and breath to be open cannot rush this. For our teens, 2SLGTBQIA - don't want them to wait to share breath and learn to care for themselves and each other. They don't have time for this, we don't make time for them to do this. How do we hold space for girls to do this sooner?"

Concluding Summary

Through this summit, we've identified numerous governmental and policy barriers impeding our work—and equipped ourselves with concrete ideas and a collective determination to overcome them. What remains is support and resources to act.

Forging new, de-siloed partnerships has never been more important, underlining the power of collaboration and shared knowledge. Despite facing challenges, we've reaffirmed our commitment to supporting one another and recognizing the diverse perspectives and backgrounds within our community.

Moving forward, there's a clear call to action: to continue fostering spaces for collaboration, rest, and learning, while ensuring inclusivity and grace in our interactions with clients and colleagues alike. The discussions summarized herein showcase tangible progress and the momentum within gender based violence prevention work, signaling a promising future of continued dialogue and action. Let's seize this momentum and strive for real, informed, positive change together.