



**LEVEL**  
YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM



A Step Towards Meaningful  
Inclusion of Trans, Non-Binary,  
Two-Spirit Black, Indigenous, and  
People of Colour (BIPOC) in BC's  
Poverty Reduction Strategy

**TIARÉ JUNG**

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The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), & səliilwətaʔ (Tseil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.

## ABOUT THE LEVEL INITIATIVE

LEVEL is a youth-engagement initiative of Vancouver Foundation that aims to address racial inequity. We do this by investing in the leadership capacity of Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, and refugee youth to create more opportunities throughout the non-profit and charitable sector.

Despite being the fastest-growing youth population in British Columbia, Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee youth don't have the same opportunities as other young people. Race continues to be a factor that hinders their ability to have a say in decisions that impact their lives.

LEVEL empowers these youth by building their capacity to challenge and change those systems that hinder their ability to build a more just world.

LEVEL CONSISTS OF  
THREE PILLARS OF  
WORK TO ADVANCE  
RACIAL EQUITY:



### ABOUT THE LEVEL YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP) brings together young people between the ages of 19 and 29 from across British Columbia who identify as being Indigenous or racialized immigrants or refugees. Indigenous and racialized Newcomer youth are disproportionately impacted by certain public policies and are rarely included in the development and implementation of public policy process. The LEVEL YPP aims to provide these youth with equitable training and leadership opportunities to better navigate the public policy landscape, and to develop new tools and skills to influence, shape, and advocate for policy changes that are relevant in their own communities. Having young people directly involved in shaping policies that impact their lives is essential to creating systemic, meaningful change. The LEVEL YPP's training is grounded from and within Indigenous peoples' worldviews, which the program acknowledges, could vary from person-to-person or nation-to-nation. Indigenous worldviews place a large emphasis on connections to the land. This perspective views the land as sacred; where everything and everyone is related and connected; where the quality of the relationships formed are key in life; where what matters is the success and well-being of the community, and where there can be many truths as they are based on individual lived experiences.<sup>1</sup> As such, an important premise of this training is to centre and place a particular focus on the fact that the work that has gone into developing this training, as well as the training itself, has taken and will take place on unceded (never given away/stolen) territories of the hən̓d̓əmin̓əm̓-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the Halkomelem-speaking Tseil-Waututh peoples, and of the sn̓íchim-speaking Skwx\_wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

1 <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-worldviews-vs-western-worldviews>



TIARÉ  
JUNG

I am a Hawaiian, Chinese, multi-racial of origins still being uncovered, guest living on Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh stolen land. As a graphic recorder and illustrator I draw live conversations and use images for knowledge translation and sense-making. I love to collaborate with those who centre dignity, health, education, housing, anti-racism, and decolonization in their work. Supporting friends who are trans, non-binary BIPOC, and living with neurodiversity through constant displacement and violent living conditions moves me to advocate for housing and services in which we all belong.

I speak from my own experience of displacement as a 27-year-old, person of colour, Mahu (gender fluid in Hawaiian - my ancestral language), queer person. I speak from my experience of supporting my chosen family, trans, non-binary BIPOC through violent living situations, constant displacement, and homelessness. I speak as a loved one who has been forced into the role of becoming an unpaid support worker to ensure the survival of my chosen family.

I have lived as an uninvited guest on the stolen land of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Wuatuth, and Squamish people (Vancouver) for the past 10 years. I have moved more than 10 times in these 10 years. In 2018, I was displaced in the middle of the night with my partner due to the anti-Black racism, transphobia, and survivor-blaming attitudes of our roommates. I was temporarily homeless and couch surfing while acting as a full-time caregiver for my partner. I moved six times before finding dog-friendly, affordable, safe housing where we wouldn't face racism, transphobia, or mental-health shaming. That year, I worked full-time while doing unpaid support work to assist six of my close family and friends through housing crises.

## Include trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC people in BC's Poverty Reduction Strategy

These policy solutions centre the lived experience and skills of those who live at the intersections of gender diversity and racialization and therefore have the rich and unique contributions to inclusive communities.

trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC  
Black. Indigenous. People of Colour.

Centre and prioritize Black and Indigenous lives, who are the most targeted among BIPOC people.

Centre and prioritize trans women and femmes who are the most targeted among gender diverse people.

Especially centre and prioritize Black and Indigenous Trans women and femmes.



### Hire trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC outreach workers

Support our outreach workers to do sustainable work

### Train trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC outreach workers

Build capacity and invest in trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC people with lived experience to end cycles of poverty and homelessness

### Hire trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC outreach workers as consultants

Value the knowledge of our Outreach Workers to reduce systemic poverty



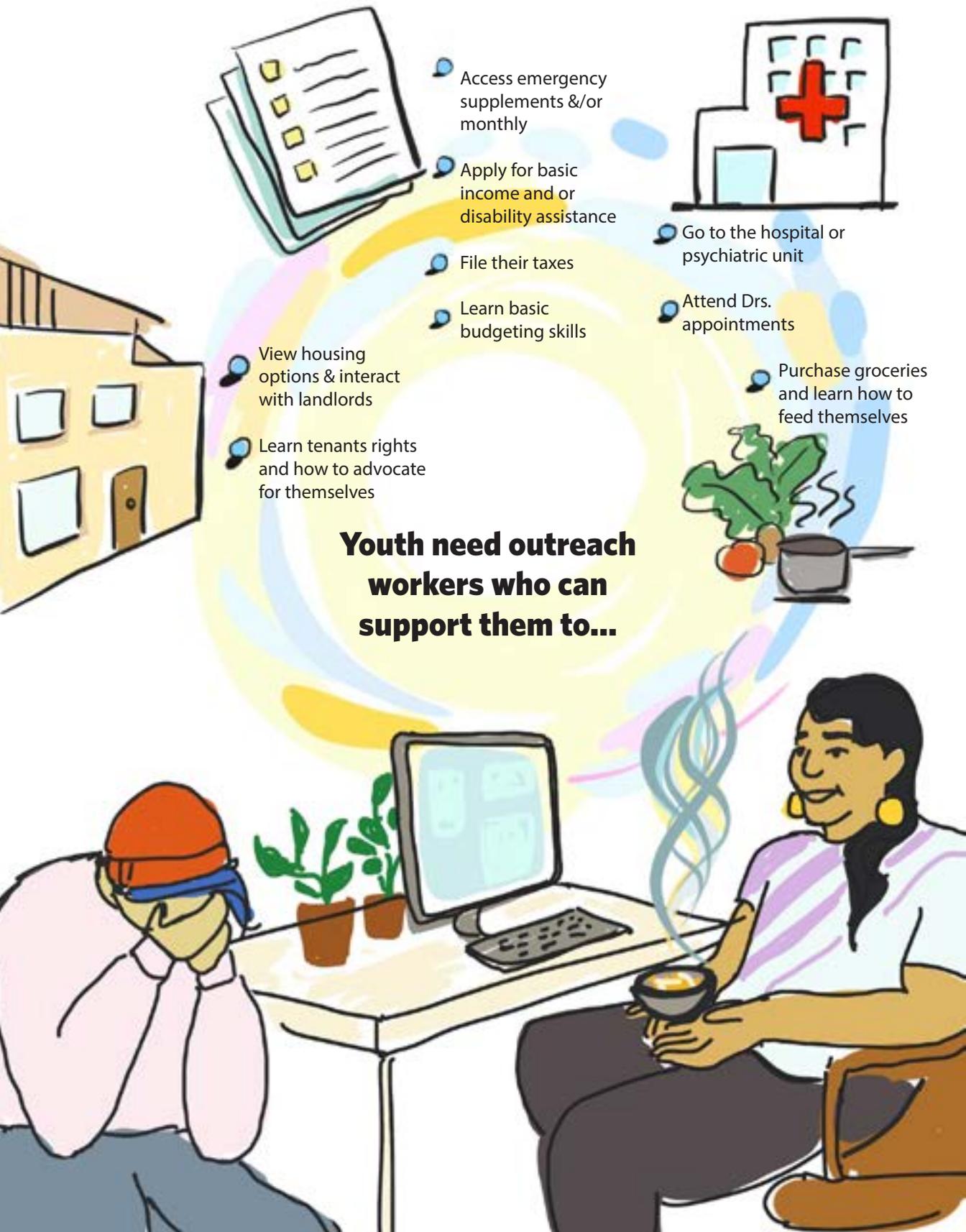
## PURPOSE

The BC Poverty Reduction Strategy recognizes that “poverty doesn’t affect all people equally. Indigenous peoples, transgender people, people of colour, refugees, and people with disabilities all face more barriers and higher rates of poverty... Indigenous peoples and people with disabilities are twice as likely to live in poverty. Poverty is an intersectional problem.”

There are skilled people living at those intersections, specifically trans, non-binary, and 2-Spirit BIPOC people whose lived experience and professional capacity positions them uniquely to offer solutions and uplift the most marginalized in community. In creating well-paid, well-supported positions for skilled workers with lived experience in poverty and homelessness, our province is investing in more inclusive, resilient, and creative communities.

This is a proposal for the creation of well-paid and well-supported roles for skilled trans, non-binary, and 2-Spirit BIPOC people to do essential frontline support work and systemic policy change work:

1. Create at least two well-paid, well-supported outreach worker positions at the Broadway Youth Resource Centre, Vancouver, BC.
2. Hire two to four outreach workers with two or more years’ experience to inform ongoing poverty reduction strategy and commitments.
3. Creation of scholarships/ grants to enable trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC people to access education and enter roles as outreach, child, and youth support workers.



## PROBLEM DEFINITION AND BACKGROUND

### IMPACTS OF COLONIZATION

- Trans, non-binary, and 2S BIPOC people have and continue to make fabric-altering contributions to society and human rights (ie: Marsha P. Johnson - Stonewall), this results in more space for all people to be their whole selves.
- Prior to colonization, many Indigenous cultures celebrated gender-diverse people. In some Indigenous cultures, gender-diverse people often held revered roles "such as healers, matchmakers, and counsellors, among many others. As part of the colonization process, there has been an attempted erasure of Two-Spirit people." - TransCareBC

### VIOLENCE FACED BY TRANS, NON-BINARY, 2S BIPOC PEOPLE

At least once a month, my social media feed features yet another article on the attack or murder of a Black trans woman in the United States. This is a call to protect trans women in our community from the antagonism of TERFS/ SWERFS (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists/ Sex Worker Exclusionary Radical Feminists). These stories share roots in colonization and dehumanization that enables so many Indigenous Women and gender-diverse people to be missing and murdered. At the 2019, March on Pride, hosted by Black Lives Matter, Vancouver, there was a clear call to action: We need to uphold the safety and voices of Black lives, Indigenous lives, and trans women.

Violence is particularly targeted at:

- Dark-skinned Black people
- Visibly Indigenous people
- Trans women and femmes
- Anyone whose gender identity gets questioned when they try to use a gendered washroom.

And especially:

- Dark-skinned Black and/or visibly Indigenous trans women
- Dark-skinned Black and/or visibly Indigenous people whose gender gets questioned when they try to use a gendered washroom.
- Hogan's Alley is an example of Vancouver's legacy of anti-Black racism, in which Black community was displaced for the development of the Georgia Viaduct. Reparations are owed to Vancouver's Black community. The Hogan's Alley Society is collaborating with the city to revitalize a hub that centres Black and Indigenous community in Strathcona.
- "There is a critical gap in StatsCan data on transgender and non-binary Canadians. A report published in 2018 by Statistics Canada highlighted trends of violent victimization for lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons, but there was no mention of trans people. The lack of representation in national data acts as an erasure and slows down the progress of the LGBTQ community, said Osmel Guerra Maynes, the executive director of Qmunity in British Columbia. There is no excuse for not having the data in 2018. Transgender people continue living in the dangerous intersections of phobia, racism, and sexism." - TheStar

(2013) In a project assessing barriers to well-being for Indigenous gender-diverse people in Ontario Canada, the following results were found:

- 44% gender-diverse participants identified as 2S
- 47% experienced high levels of poverty
- 34 % experienced homelessness or under-housing
- 67% reported having to move due to being trans
- 61% reported at least one past-year unmet healthcare need
- 73 % had experienced violence due to being trans
- 76 % had seriously considered suicide
- 1/5 had been incarcerated while presenting in their “felt gender”
- 44 % practiced Aboriginal spirituality
- 19% had seen an Aboriginal Elder for mental health support.

(2013-2014) The Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey found:

- 83% of participants lived in their felt gender at least part-time; half lived in their felt gender full-time. Those who lived in their felt gender all the time were almost 50% more likely to report good or excellent mental health
- Almost 60% of youth reported self-harm within the past year
- More than 30% had attempted suicide
- 70% participants reported sexual harassment
- 60% reported discrimination because of their gender identity
- 36% of the younger participants (ages 14-18) had been physically threatened or injured in the past year
- 30% of youth did not have an adult in their family they could talk to about problems
- 70% felt their family did not understand them. When they felt cared about and supported by family, they reported better health
- Only 15% of youth with a family doctor report feeling comfortable discussing their transgender-specific health care needs
- 30% younger (ages 14-18) and 50% older youth (ages 19-25) reported missing needed physical health care during the past year, and even more missed needed mental healthcare.

## SUPPORTING THE MOST VULNERABLE

Gender-diverse, racialized youth who are facing homelessness need direct, individualized support. They need someone with whom they can build a relationship of trust and confidence. Someone with the ability to navigate systems and support their needs in the moment. Many of these youth are street-entrenched, suffer panic attacks and/ or other mental wellness barriers and/or trauma responses, have never lived on their own, and are learning life skills such as basic nervous-system regulation, interacting with landlords, grocery shopping, and cooking. Because of the volume of barriers faced by people living at the intersections of gender diversity and racialization, expanding supports to the age of 32 would include people for whom these supports didn't exist when they were street-entrenched youth.

“The most marginalized folks are street-entrenched. They have no idea what to do. They need lots of support. We brought five street-entrenched youth into housing. They didn't know how to live in a clean, brand-new house, they went into trauma response. We need outreach workers who understand those reactions and can provide trauma-informed support as these youth learn new skills.” - Jotika Housing Support Worker & Subsidy Coordinator

## WHY WE NEED TRANS, NON-BINARY, 2S BIPOC PEOPLE IN OUTREACH ROLES AND INFORMING POLICY...

For young people who face poverty, homelessness, transphobia, racism, anti-Indigenous racism, and/ or anti-Black racism having people available to support them who they can see themselves reflected in creates not only safety and trust, but also hope and possibility models.

One safe person - a social worker, nurse, care provider, or outreach worker, (too often unpaid family/ community members) can save so many lives. A care provider who has lived experiences in the intersections of transphobia and racism and who is invested in the well-being of their client has the ability to build trust and support that person to access healthcare, social assistance, emergency supplements, and other life lines.

## A SUCCESS STORY IN HEALTHCARE

Dr. James Makokis is a Cree, Two-Spirit doctor, and the only doctor working with transgender patients in Enoch First Nation, a Cree Reserve of 2400 people in central Alberta. Many of his patients drive up to eight hours and walk miles along a dirt road to see this Two-Spirit specialist who makes them feel safe. Dr. Makokis brings together Indigenous and Western teachings. His openness about his own identity enables his patients to feel comfortable and also accept themselves.

*“Being from a marginalized community myself, being a Two-Spirit person, being an Indigenous person, I know how scary it can be to access care from the healthcare field.”*

- Dr, James Makokis

## MEANINGFUL INCLUSION, NOT TOKENIZATION

Too often attempts at diversity means one or two people of colour, or one to two trans people are accepted into a space and:

- Expected to speak on behalf of an entire demographic in which there are many unique experiences
- Their contributions are edited or erased to appease white fragility
- They are used to legitimize the “diversity” of the space they have been invited into without a broader cultural and systemic change that enables more gender diverse and/or racialized people to comfortably exist and meaningfully contribute.
- So how do we avoid tokenization and create meaningful reciprocal relationships?
- Recognize that no one person can speak on behalf of a demographic and aspire to include a variety of voices, especially those who are most targeted by violence
- Create more than two, professional, influential positions for trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC people
- Create structures that reward mutual support over competition
- Compensate trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC at professional rates
- Create job descriptions with clear, achievable goals and supports (open-ended, vague contracts create an exploitive dynamic with unclear expectations that often lead to over-excision and burn-out, especially for people of colour and femmes who are constantly told that their labour is not enough)
- Invest in support, especially cultural supports, to enable people to learn, express vulnerability, access healing and mental wellness resources
- Include paid feedback and accountability mechanisms that are acted upon.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## RECOMMENDATION 1: OUTREACH WORKERS

Housing first workers funded by BC Housing significantly reduced homelessness. Create and fund new outreach worker positions specifically for trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC people. Young trans, non-binary, 2S people need to be able to see themselves reflected in their supports. They need to build lasting relationships of trust to transition into greater self-sufficiency.

Specifically, there is a need for the equivalent of a full-time outreach worker at the Broadway Youth Resource Centre in Vancouver.

- Hire in teams of two-three for 17.5 hours/week - this will create a more manageable caseload and peer support in this work
- Pay \$30-\$37/hour - this work saves lives, demands exhaustive emotional labour, and skill. Most outreach workers have no benefits, no coverage, no vacation, no childcare, no covered transportation. Being well-compensated is essential.
- Three-year positions (one year is too short)
- Qualifications: Training in social work, and/or youth and child support work, and/or counselling/therapy, trauma-informed practice.

Support the sustainability and well-being of outreach workers. This work causes high-rates of burnout and turnover, which ultimately costs time and money in hiring new staff and rebuilding new relationships.

Support outreach workers through:

- Trauma-informed weekly supervision
  - A weekly opportunity to connect with your teacher, see your coworkers, talk about what's going on, what we did, and how we felt about it
  - How to regulate our own bodies, how to deal with our own trauma and triggers
  - Healing fund, to access in your own way (this can be culturally specific, ie: a sweat led by 2S person)
  - Access to Elders and knowledge-keepers for support.

## RECOMMENDATION 2: OUTREACH WORKERS AS POLICY CONSULTANTS

Hire trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC outreach workers as consultants to inform the poverty reduction strategy and housing strategy. When I co-facilitated a community engagement for the poverty reduction strategy, one participant shared that in housing co-op processes, they had witnessed people with darker skin being skipped to prioritize white and light-skinned applicants in the co-op waitlist. This is one example of how shadism and racism bars BIPOC, particularly dark-skinned people, Black people, and visibly Indigenous people from safe, secure housing. Trans, non-binary, and 2S BIPOC outreach workers have unique knowledge and perspective to create safe, inclusive housing options for those who face the most discrimination. Trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC outreach workers would also have relationships with clients to meaningfully involve them in the co-design of housing solutions.

- Hire three-four trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC outreach workers with three or more years of experience, on contract, as part-time consultants
- Pay at full government consulting rates \$175-\$200/hr
- On-year contract minimum (six months isn't enough time)
- Clear contract expectations with manageable deliverables
- Contractors will work mostly independently focussed on their individual expertise and relationships with their communities for efficacy
- An introductory meeting, mid-point meeting, and closing meeting among consultants for cross-learning and support should be offered and paid at full consulting rates
- Clear supports
- Access and funding to a knowledge keepers and Elders should be provided.

## RECOMMENDATION 3: SCHOLARSHIPS FOR TRANS, NON-BINARY, 2S BIPOC TO BECOME OUTREACH WORKERS

Create scholarships/grants to build capacity and enable trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC young adults to access education and enter roles that directly support housing and poverty reduction services. Many Trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC people want to use their experience to help others overcome what they themselves have faced.

- Provide full-tuition grants to trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC people with lived experience in poverty &/or homelessness to attend school for outreach work, social work, child and youth support work, and/or counselling
- Assess needs of trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC students to access school. Do they need housing supports? Mental-wellness supports? How can we support their growth and contribution to the field?

## CONCLUSION

*“As Indigenous people, we’ve always had gender diversity and sexuality diversity among our Nations before colonization existed on Turtle Island. With the imposition of colonization, christianity, residential schools, and the Sixties Scoop a lot of those teachings of gender diversity have been lost. A lot of people are searching for their identity as 2S people and the roles and responsibilities that come with that.”*

*Being 2s in my community means that I am fully who I am. I’m not shy about that. I don’t pretend to be someone else. 2S people are very gifted individuals and they can do many different things if people don’t stifle their growth and development.”*

- Dr. James Makokis

BC’s First Poverty Reduction Strategy, released in 2019, sets out to achieve “A more diverse, equitable, and prosperous province. While targets are expressed as statistics, effective poverty reduction strategy needs to be rooted in empathy, understanding, and inclusion.”

Upholding trans, non-binary, 2S BIPOC to attend to the basic needs of our own communities is centring our dignity, capability, and justice in our communities. This approach that centres dignity and self-determination is being modelled by The Hogan’s Alley Society, whose mission is to “To revive the social, political, cultural and economic histories of Vancouver’s Black communities through the delivery of housing, social spaces, education, health, and intergenerational linkage.”

The intersectional experiences of trans, non-binary, and 2-Spirit BIPOC are so varied. We have and continue to survive in a system that was designed to eliminate us. Those of us who survive hold solutions to poverty and homelessness. Creating space for our safety, healing, and belonging, will ultimately make our communities more inclusive, resilient, and creative.

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Broadway Youth Resource Centre
- Sulva Khurshid  
Child and Youth Care Practitioner Diploma  
Non-binary, Queer, POC
- Angela Sterritt  
Journalist, CBC
- Andrea Vokubrat (she/they)  
Peer Support Coordinator  
FoundryBC Central Office

### Resources:

- The Meaning of Mahu  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pCThN5y46Q>
- Trans Basics: Two-Spirit  
<http://www.phsa.ca/transcarebc/trans-basics/two-spirit>
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## ABOUT VANCOUVER FOUNDATION

Vancouver Foundation is Community Inspired. We are a community foundation that connects the generosity of donors with the energy, ideas, and time of people in the community. Together, we've been making meaningful and lasting impacts in neighborhoods and communities since 1943. We work with individuals, corporations, and charitable agencies to create permanent endowment funds and then use the income to support thousands of charities. We recognize that communities are complex and that collaboration between multiple stakeholders is needed to help everyone thrive and evolve. Vancouver Foundation brings together donors, non-profits and charities, government, media and academic institutions, local leaders, and passionate individuals to build meaningful and lasting change in the province of British Columbia. We see young people, their voices and experiences as part of that vision to building meaningful change.



**LEVEL**

AN INITIATIVE OF **vancouver**  
foundation

200-475 W. Georgia Street,  
Vancouver, BC, V6B 4M9  
604.688.2204

[level@vancouverfoundation.ca](mailto:level@vancouverfoundation.ca)  
[www.levelvf.ca](http://www.levelvf.ca)

 @LEVELVF

 @LEVEL\_VF

 @LEVEL\_VF