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Two-Spirit People in the Workplace

In this section, we introduce and learn about some of the Two-Spirit individuals who have full-time employment working with and for Two-Spirit people(s) and communities, and learn about some of their exciting and groundbreaking work. It is important to pause and acknowledge that these individuals are on and are forging a Two-Spirit career path!

Two-Spirit people working is not new, as Two-Spirit work and organizations have been led and run by countless volunteers for many years. What is different is these individuals are now employed in full-time positions and are supported to work with and for Two-Spirit communities.

Jessy Dame (Métis)

Two-Spirit Program Manager, Community-Based Research Centre



Jessy Dame is a very proud self-identified Two-Spirit, gay, Métis registered nurse, who has worked within neo-natal and post-partum health, as well as within remote Indigenous communities on the coast and within northern British Columbia.

Jessy is the Two-Spirit Program Manager at the Community-Based Research Centre. Jessy works with the Two-Spirit community to create resources and advocate for services. One of the initiatives Jessy is developing is an at-home HIV and STI testing program for Two-Spirit and Indigenous gay, bi, and other men who have sex with men (gbMSM) who live in rural and remote areas of the province.

“As a Two-Spirit person, working within an organization that gives a sense of validation and is fully investing in my community is beyond uplifting,” said Jessy. “I cannot stress enough the importance of organizations investing in our community to challenge the long history of systemic racism and gender and sexuality discrimination.”





Jonathon Potskin (Neheiyaw/First Nations Cree)

Interim Executive Director, 2 Spirits in Motion Society



Dr. Jonathon Potskin/Nipakwesimowin-Kiseyiniw (their Nehiyaw/Cree name) is Neheiyaw/First Nations Cree and Métis from the Sawridge First Nations, Treaty 8 territory and is a proud ayahkwêw (Two-Spirit in Cree). Jonathon recently completed doctoral studies at the University of Sydney, School of Social and Political Sciences; has extensive experience in executive and management work within many communities across Turtle Island; and is a lecturer at the University of British Columbia at the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice teaching Gender, Race & Indigeneity in Canada.

As the Interim Executive Director of the 2 Spirits in Motion Society (2SiMS), Jonathon works to meet its mission of creating, maintaining, and strengthening a safe and supportive environment for Two-Spirit people to express themselves through cultural ways of knowing and to succeed and be empowered in all areas, grounded in the medicines that Two-Spirit people carry. Jonathon is working to forward a Two-Spirit governance system through the balance of our modern positions in Canadian society with our cultural Two-Spirit Teachings.

“2SiMS is a part of the resurgence of Indigenous identities/cultures across Turtle Island” said Jonathon. “I am so proud to be a part of an organization like 2SiMS that is grounded in our cultural and spiritual practices that assists us to bring forward the voice of our Two-Spirit - Indigiqueer people.”

2SiMS was born from discussions at Two Spirits in Motion: the 1st Canadian Forum on 2 Spirit Peoples, HIV/AIDS and Health held in Edmonton, Alberta in February 2003. There were more than 80 delegates at the inaugural forum where several key recommendations were made to advance Two-Spirit community needs and issues in Canada at the national level. Jonathon was one of the youth in attendance and there were only a few youth representatives at this meeting. Two significant recommendations were to create a national Two-Spirit organization and to continue hosting national forums for Two-Spirit people.

For more information on 2SiMS visit: <https://2spiritsinmotion.com/>.





Jeffery Chalifoux (Cree/Citizen of the Métis Nation) Executive Director, Edmonton 2 Spirit Society



Jeffery Chalifoux, Cree/Métis is an Indigenous Two-Spirit social worker (they/them and he/him pronouns) and is a proud parent.

Edmonton 2 Spirit Society (E2S) recently hired Jeffery as Executive Director to lead this new organization. Chalifoux is tasked with re-establishing and enhancing our traditional roles and responsibilities as Two-Spirit people in Indigenous communities while creating supportive environments within all societies for contemporary Two-Spirit peoples.”

Chalifoux notes that, “Two-Spirit are an integral part of our Indigenous societies, and it’s an honour to be chosen as the inaugural Executive Director of E2S. I will endeavour to continue, and expand, the work of the many tireless volunteers, members, and Elders who have carefully pursued to re-establish and enhance our traditional roles and responsibilities as Two-Spirit people. In the coming years, my efforts and energies will be to advance the mission of E2S and focus on collaboratively building partnerships and resources among 2S-BIPOC-LGBTQ+ people.”

As an advocate for Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ communities, Chalifoux took part in co-founding the Edmonton 2 Spirit Society in April 2018. They have worked on local initiatives where they have been an active leader and volunteer with various organizations, including the Alberta College of Social Workers’ Sexual and Gender Diversity Committee, the Imperial Sovereign Court of the Wild Rose, and the Edmonton Men’s Health Collective, and have worked collaboratively with many others.

Chalifoux is involved nationally in various capacities, taking part in the founding of The Enchanté Network as a Two-Spirit representative and volunteering with the 2 Spirits in Motion Society and Fierté Canada Pride. No stranger to overcoming adversity and the impacts of colonialism, Chalifoux openly shares his lived experiences through homelessness, 20 years of active addictions, and over a decade in correctional systems. However, Chalifoux will soon achieve a master’s degree in clinical social work and continues striving towards their doctorate degree in social work with a focus on Indigenous Two-Spirit health.

E2S recently received a Community Capacity Fund grant from the Department of Women & Gender Equality. Jeffery will spearhead this 17-month project and will strengthen the capacity and networks of E2S to advance 2SLGBTQ+ equality. This will be achieved by hiring a Community Liaison; building managerial capacity; strengthening collaboration among organizations; ensuring long-term sustainability;





advancing 2SLGBTQ+ equality with an intersectional approach, such as race, age, official language; and improving access to funding opportunities. The project includes board governance training, a strategic planning session, applying for federal incorporation status, applying for federal charitable organization status, two community consultations, building an intersectional network, and hosting two network summits. By March 2022, the E2S will have a strategic plan, detailed work plans for executive director and staff, a community impact assessment, organizational policies and procedures, a human resource manual, a fundraising plan, developed partnerships, and an intersectional network.

For more information on E2S visit: <https://e2s.ca/>.

Cheyenne Mihko Kihêw (Neheiyaw/First Nation Cree) Community Liaison, Edmonton 2 Spirit Society



Cheyenne Mihko Kihêw (all pronouns) is a Two-Spirit nehiyaw, born and raised in Amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton, Alberta). As a grandchild of residential school survivors, Cheyenne grew up outside of their own culture and has a background of adversity and resilience. They are on a journey of cultural reclamation to learn the traditional teachings and nehiyawewin (*Cree*) language that was lost in their immediate family due to the impacts of colonization.

“It is my honor to join the Edmonton 2 Spirit Society as a Community Liaison. I am eager to build upon the foundational work laid by E2S, while assisting with the advancement of the organization in this exciting new phase,” said Cheyenne. “Through this role, it is my hope to strengthen the relationship between E2S and the local Two-

Spirit community. I will strive to be a useful source of information and support while creating opportunities for growth through ceremony, education, and peer guidance. As a Two-Spirit person, I recognize the struggles of reconnecting with cultural knowledge so it will be crucial for me to do my best to bridge the gap created by colonization. I look forward to serving the community and to continuing the important vision created by E2S.”

Through their own lived experiences with substance misuse and street involvement, Cheyenne saw first-hand the power of community and how essential front-line work is for folks accessing services. This ignited a passion for community-based work, leading Cheyenne to become involved in different organizations nationally and locally.

Cheyenne was involved in various Canada World Youth Indigenous-focused projects as a volunteer and a supervisor in Peru and Nicaragua. She spent several years working with Old Strathcona Youth Society, most prominently as the agency’s inaugural





Indigenous Resource Coordinator. Cheyenne graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from MacEwan University with a major in Sociology. Following graduation, Cheyenne joined the Prevention and Education team with HIV Edmonton as the gbMSM lead, a role that afforded them the privilege of incorporating many of her personal passions into her work.

Over the last 18 months, they have worked with the 2SLGBTQ+ community by developing educational resources and delivering programs on HIV and sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection (STBBI) prevention, health promotion, and support using an equity lens. They are the current Chair of the Board of Directors for the Boyle Street Education Centre, their former high school to which they credit much of their achievements. Cheyenne is unapologetic in their identity as a fat Indigi-queer femme. They follow a life motto of “Aspire to Inspire,” reminding her to always do her best to be a good human and to empower others to live in their truest and most authentic selves.

For more information on E2S visit: <https://e2s.ca/>.

John R. Sylliboy (L’nu/Mi’kmaq)

Interim Executive Director, Wabanaki Two-Spirit Alliance



John is from the Millbrook First Nations in Nova Scotia and is one of the Wabanaki Two-Spirit Alliance (W2SA) co-founders in 2011 alongside Tuma Young.

John is the Interim Executive Director of W2SA, which helps to build support and awareness of Two-Spirit in Mi’kma’ki and Canada. He is also a consultant in First Nations educational governance, the Two-Eyed Seeing approach in education and research, Indigenous post-secondary education, and areas that impact the well-being and educational outcomes of Two-Spirit.

W2SA has organized local, regional, and international gatherings in the Atlantic region in collaboration with First Nations Communities, Native Friendship Centres, and other regional 2SLGBTQ+ organizations. W2SA has hosted three regional gatherings in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Bangor, ME. A fourth regional gathering planned for 2020 was put on hold because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

W2SA has hosted a series of local and community events in Eskasoni First Nation; Moncton, New Brunswick; Mount Saint Vincent University; and Halifax, Nova Scotia. In 2011, the Two-Spirit community gathered at Liscombe Lodge, Nova Scotia to establish the Alliance with an Advisory of Elders, youth, volunteers, academics, and knowledge-





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holders. It was the first regional gathering in 15 years and was attended by more than 50 Two-Spirit people who shared their stories of survival, resiliency, and the celebration of life. At this gathering, the mission and vision were born for the Alliance and the Eagle Head Staff. It was also at the Liscombe gathering that the name of the Wabanaki Two-Spirit Alliance was approved.

John is a doctoral student at McGill University. He was awarded the Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarships doctoral scholarship and the Kausattumi Graduate Scholarship to further his studies about Two-Spirits from a L'nuwey worldview. John's research is on gender, sexuality and sex, and to identify terms for Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ words in Mi'kmaw. John's goal is to build positive cultural identity through language revitalization to reflect the diversity of gender identities and sexuality of L'nu youth in a contemporary context.

For more information on W2SA visit: <http://w2sa.ca/>.

