Wisdom2Action
Savoir pour agir

Shaking the Movers Atlantic

2SLGBTQIA+ Youth Support and Community.

LPC
Landon Pearson Centre
Carleton University

Carleton
University

Table of Contents

This report is dedicated to the Hon. Landon Pearson..... 2
Background and Overview of Workshop..... 3
Definitions.....5
Articles of the UNCRC Reflected in the Discussion..... 6
Discussion 1: Safe Spaces in Your Community.....8
Themes from discussion 1: 2SLGBTQIA+ Safe Spaces for Youth.....9
In their own words:.....10
Discussion 2: 2SLGBTQIA+ Education..... 12
Themes from Discussion 2: 2SLGBTQIA+ Education..... 13
In Their Own Words:.....15
Discussion 3: 2SLGBTQIA+ Healthcare.....17
Themes From Discussion 3: 2SLGBTQIA+ Healthcare..... 18
In Their Own Words:.....19
Conclusion.....20

This report is dedicated to the Hon. Landon Pearson

Hon. Landon Pearson was a Canadian Senator and a children's rights advocate throughout her life. In November of 2006 she announced the opening of the Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights. The Landon Pearson Centre is committed to enhancing and improving the lives of children and young people and promoting awareness about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is through this work that Shaking the Movers as a workshop series can exist. Senator Landon Carter Pearson was a dedicated advocate for children and young people, and her legacy has continued through the work of the Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights.

Background and Overview of Workshop

About Shaking the Movers: Shaking the Movers (STM) is an annual youth-driven and youth-led workshop that takes place across the country. STM workshops offer spaces designed to enable children and youth to consider the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in the context of their lives. In turn, participants prepare comments and recommendations intended for governments, academia and civil society concerning its implementation. Participating in STM provides children and youth with a unique opportunity to exercise their rights to take part in critical civil and political processes with the assurance that their voices will be listened to and heard.

Overview of the workshop: On March 8, 2025, we conducted a three-hour virtual workshop for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth between the ages of 13 and 17 from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. This is the first time that Shaking the Movers has done a workshop that specifically focused on the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Seven young people attended the workshop, along with three facilitators and a lead organizer, all from New Brunswick or Nova Scotia. Recruitment for the workshop was done entirely online via social media and in connection with local 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations such as The Youth Project in Nova Scotia and Chroma in New Brunswick. We also worked with national organizations such as Wisdom2Action. The workshop consisted of a series of discussions focused on the 2024-25 theme of Shaking the Movers theme “Building Our Communities of Care.” Prior to the workshop we identified three sub-themes: community spaces, education, and health care. Our facilitators identified these three topics as high areas of concern for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, unlike the majority of their cisgender and heterosexual peers, often have their rights very publicly discussed in media. In recent years this has become more evident with the rise of movements such as the 1 Million March for Children, an online group who when organizing a demonstration in Halifax, claimed that their march's purpose was “standing united as one against the perversion that is targeting our children in schools but also online.” Groups like the 1 Million March for Children are an example of the increased anti-LGBT and specifically anti-trans rhetoric focused around young people. (Lauren Phillips, 2023)

As you will see from reading this report, this was a small but very engaged group. In recruiting for this workshop there were struggles to find participants, an aspect of this may be attributed to the fact that many 2SLGBTQIA+ youth are not open with their family or community about their identity. For this workshop, participants under 16 years were required to provide parental consent, which can be a barrier youth face to events specifically identified as 2SLGBTQIA+. This is also largely the reason we aimed the workshop towards older youth, focusing on those in middle and high school. There is likely room to expand these kinds of conversations to groups of younger children with the right partnerships (Gender Creative Kids, for example). In hosting this workshop Shaking the Movers has opened the door to engage more 2SLGBTQIA+ youth in the conversation around children's rights. In engaging with minority communities, it often takes organizations time to build trust from the group they seek to work with.

Facilitators: This workshop had one lead organizer and three facilitators. All were young adults who identified as part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and had experience with workshop creation and facilitation. We opened the workshop with a land acknowledgement and an introduction to a regional organization called The Wabanaki Two-Spirit Alliance. The facilitators were the first to introduce themselves, stating their name, pronouns, how they identify with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and their favourite piece of queer media. We, as facilitators, believed it was essential to let the participants know in what ways we could relate to their experiences, especially considering the vulnerability of the conversations we were having. The participants introduced themselves the same way with the understanding that they did not have to share their identity if they did not want to. We then worked together to create a safe space agreement for the group, outlining what each participant felt they would need to feel safe and supported in our conversation about the broader theme of care. We also discussed the right to pass, the ability to choose not to take part in an activity if they did not want to. Originally we had planned to have the discussion in smaller groups, but due to our size, we decided to remain as one larger group. Each discussion was broken into its own group discussion with a short break included.

Definitions

Throughout this report there is a lot of terminology used that may be new to some readers. For this reason, definitions are provided below along with terms and acronyms that were used in our workshop conversations.

2SLGBTQIA+ Community: A commonly used acronym that is used to encompass those within gender and sexuality diverse communities. It stands for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual, with the + including additional identities acknowledging the diversity within the community.

Queer: An umbrella term that some members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community use to describe gender identities and sexual orientation that exist outside of the gender binary or heterosexual framework. It can also be used to identify an individual.

Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA): Formally referred to as Gay Straight Alliances, GSA's are clubs that are student-led or community-based organizations that aim to create a safe space for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and their allies.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT): A medical treatment in which sex hormones and other hormonal medications are administered for the purpose of aligning their secondary sex characteristics with their gender identity, also called gender-affirming hormone therapy.

Dead name: A term used to refer to a name that someone no longer uses, often their name given at birth. Dead naming or being dead named is when someone is referred to by a name they no longer use. It is often a triggering experience for trans and non-binary people.

Gender Affirming Care: Healthcare that supports an individual's gender identity and expression, which can include counselling, puberty blockers, hormone replacement therapy, and surgeries.

Cishet: An abbreviation of cisgender [someone who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth] and heterosexual. Anyone who doesn't identify as part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Articles of the UNCRC Reflected in the Discussion.

The following were addressed by Shaking the Movers 2025 Atlantic:

Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Article 13

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

(a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or

(b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

Article 14

1. States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

2. States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.

3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Article 15

1. States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.

2. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of these rights other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

Discussion 1: Safe Spaces in Your Community

In our discussions, we wanted to explore what spaces within the community the youth felt safe in. This feeling of safety is part of building communities of care. This is a particularly important subject for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, considering many are not able to be open about their identity with family or community members. In this section, the youth took a particular focus on Gender and Sexualities Alliances or GSA's. GSA's are clubs often organized by students with the support of staff to create a safe space for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and their allies. For many, especially in rural communities these are the only openly queer spaces they have access to~~o~~. Having space to feel accepted for being who you are is important for anyone but in particular youth. Without designated queer spaces, people can often feel isolated and that what they are going through or feeling is abnormal. In considering the theme of "building our communities of care" we felt it was important to have a conversation about what the participants' communities looked like and if they felt that the spaces designed to foster community and connection were being adequately supported.

Questions

What 2SLGBTQIA+ spaces do you currently have access to in your community? Do you feel like these spaces are inclusive to all youth?

Do you have community spaces that are specifically for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community that have become inclusive spaces?

What are 2SLGBTQIA+ spaces in your school like? If they exist, do you find them to be positive spaces? Do your teachers support them?

If they do not exist, why do you think that is? What kind of spaces would you like to see?

Themes from discussion 1: 2SLGBTQIA+ Safe Spaces for Youth.

For many of the youth participating there was limited access to queer spaces outside of their GSA's as these resources have been concentrated in city centres or are not open to minors. Some had found community and support through other communities such as the music scene or comic-con style events. However, the youth recognized that these spaces were restricted by high costs and were not always an option year-round.

The youth who had experiences with GSA's in their schools felt as though the clubs did not receive enough support and were not goal oriented. This left spaces being poorly attended or failing to exist entirely.

When asked a follow up question from one of the facilitators about what they meant by GSA's being more goal oriented, participants expressed feelings that these spaces felt like an afterthought or only being space for 2SLGBTQIA+ students to hang out without providing the support they were looking for.

Many also expressed concerns regarding bullying and safety. Some felt that being identified as someone going to a GSA could make a student a target and that the teachers and faculty were not reliable when managing issues of bullying.

In identifying goals there was a desire for a space that felt more intentional and supported the youth in becoming more involved in their community.

They also expressed that having a queer adult involved in organizing the GSA made the space more successful. Problems were identified with supportive but uneducated allies stepping in as leaders of the GSA and not understanding how to support the youths wants or needs.

In their own words:

“All GSA’s are really reliant on who is running it and if you don’t have the right adults at your school it can really affect the turn out of it” - “Not a lot of students within our GSA didn’t like the guidance counselor who was assigned to our GSA and felt he was very dismissive but the adults thought he was great.”

“I think another difficulty with school GSA’s that they are not goal-oriented - there is not a lot of thought put into why we need them. They are like, here is a room for gay kids to hang out in, which is a really odd approach. Sometimes that is all we need but many people go to that space because they need support.”

“It is hard for a student to start that conversation of what do we need and there is not usually a staff to ask what we need.”

“Queer safe space is absolutely necessary and while reconstructing the GSA model seems interesting, I can’t think of a way to do so now.”

“It can be difficult when cishet leaders run queer spaces. With my GSA at least we had the luck of having a queer guidance counselor who helped with that. It made it possible to be a space where you could get more guidance and feel you're not alone when maybe you only have your friends to talk to or no one at all about queer issues.”

“This is exactly why queer representation is a thing. People leading queer spaces and stuff and being able to recognize them as queer and then being able to share their experiences speaking queer people. - knowing that they are a queer adult that specifically understands the issues that you’re going through is really helpful, not just knowing that they read about it in a class in University or that

they also happen to have a gay uncle.
Understanding that experience intimately is completely different. It is incredibly helpful to know that you're not broken for being queer and that maybe it isn't just a phase for you that there is queer adults in your life."

"Like, I know it's a very important experience for every queer person to meet like their first queer elder or like queer older person, to be like oh my god I can survive. Knowing that there's like Queer teachers leading GSA, for example, and knowing that they will talk specifically about our experiences and understanding them on a deep level and also knowing that students can grow up to help their community. It's incredibly important and I wish that queer teachers felt safer in their school communities to be able to talk about their experiences and maybe help lead the charge and help queer youth around them."

Discussion 2: 2SLGBTQIA+ Education

In the second section of our workshop, we discussed how the education system handles the subject of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community within schools. This subject has become a very contentious issue, with many parents and communities advocating for restricted access on what can be discussed regarding gender identity and sexual orientation in schools. Care and support in an educational setting is not just important for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, but can also set the standard for how their cisgender heterosexual peers will treat them. If 2SLGBTQIA+ youth do not feel cared for or worse, rejected in their educational spaces, it limits their ability to fully access their education. In this conversation we wanted to go beyond whether or not students felt safe in their schools, but we also wanted to know if they felt represented and valued as members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Questions

Have you had the opportunity to learn about the 2SLGBTQIA+ issues in school? Do you think the subject is approached well when it is discussed?

If not, do you think this is something that would be valuable to have in your school? What would this kind of education look like?

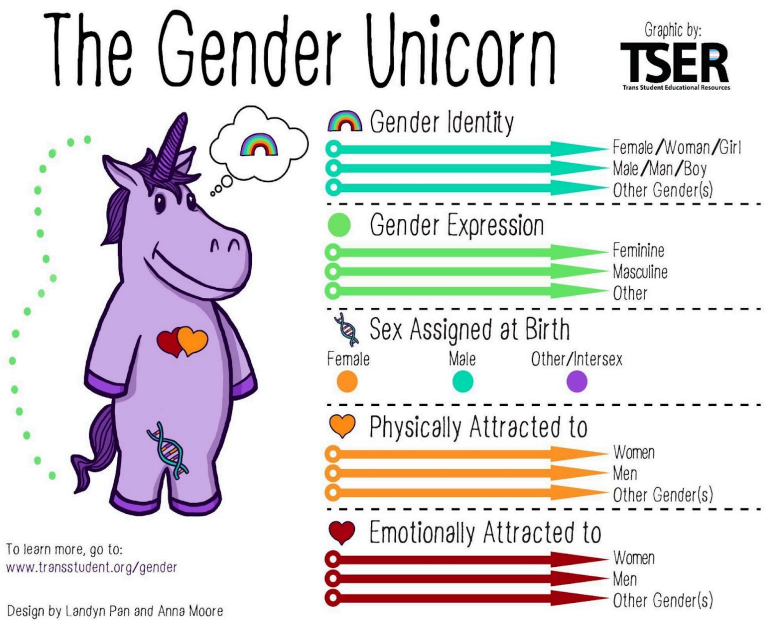
Are there efforts to encourage unity and discourage discrimination at your (this can look like anti-bullying campaigns, anti-oppression training, etc.) Do these efforts address discrimination against the 2SLGBTQIA+ community?

Do you feel as though the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and its history is reflected in other areas of your curriculum?

Themes from Discussion 2: 2SLGBTQIA+ Education

The 2SLGBTQIA+ experience is rarely, if at all, mentioned within the curriculum. Conversations about queer and trans experiences were most often regulated to being mentioned only within sex education.

The “Gender Unicorn,” an infographic created by Trans Student Educational Resources, is a very useful tool. However, many of the youth felt that using a metaphor to describe their lived experience was dehumanizing. For many participants, this is also the first and last time that gender identity and sexuality are discussed in the classroom.



The participants' experience with 2SLGBTQIA+ education was strongly affected by where they lived. Those who lived in more urban areas had access to a more progressive conversation, while those in more rural or conservative places were limited in the information they had access to.

One participant shared an experience where a math question that referenced the 2SLBTQIA+ community and census data was leaked on a local Facebook group, causing aggressive backlash from parents. While this was an extreme example, other participants also expressed that fear of public outcry or their teacher's discomfort limited their access to 2SLGBTQIA+ information.

Many of the participants did not have positive experiences with sex education and felt the 2SLGBTQIA+ community was not well-represented. With a focus on STIs and pregnancy prevention, sex education was lacking the tools needed for conversation about consent and healthy relationships.

While most schools had progressive policies in place regarding the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, many teachers were uneducated and uncomfortable with the subject, leading it to continue being taboo.

Having openly queer teachers or staff was identified as something that made a significant difference in access to 2SLGBTQIA+ information. Participants expressed that they wished more queer teachers could feel safe being open about their identity.

In Their Own Words:

“And there was one situation where he brought someone in. And they used this, at first, great model of how to experience gender expression, gender identity. And, like yeah, the difference between gender expression and gender identity. For example, I'm typically a pretty femme person. But I feel more comfortable using he and they pronouns. That's okay. Those things can be different. But the way they went about it is they explained it through a gender unicorn. And that made me feel like I was some strange creature that wasn't just a human like everyone else.”

“That didn't really know about queer people, they were probably scared of what they didn't understand. And then being compared to a unicorn wasn't a great feeling. It made me feel broken, made me feel misunderstood, made me feel like what I was experiencing wasn't actually real.”

“I mean, like they'll say, oh, it's pride month. Maybe they'll put up some flags and stuff. Other issues overshadowed Pride Month and we're talking about the issues that are good, but we already were learning a bunch about that and where it was completely ignored. None of our teachers would really mention it other than the announcements once being like, oh, it's Pride Month, where nothing was talked about. And we never have anything queer shared or even in the GSA, it wasn't very it wasn't really talked about.” - when talking about 2SLGBTQIA+ being discussed in schools.

“It was more acknowledging that it is queer month quote unquote and saying that's that. And going along with the regular teaching. Our school didn't really have a permanent like queer display at all. It's just basically once that month ends, everything queer is kind of gone.”

“To learn about queer things, you had to go look at it yourself. There was nowhere in our school that had anything really to do with it. It was all overshadowed or ignored. No one really talked about it openly, you know it's just more of a hush-hush topic.”

“Once in grade seven, the Youth Project came in and did their little spiel. That was cool. Most of the teenage boys laughed and giggled the whole time. Teachers did nothing about it. That felt great.”

“I think the only moment you had a conversation about queer people outside like outside of sex ed people arguing about queer existence is real wild real wild to me. That hurts my heart.”

Discussion 3: 2SLGBTQIA+ Healthcare

Definitions were provided to participants within this discussion. We wanted the participants to consider the various ways they access healthcare and how they felt not only about access to care related to gender identity but also interacting with the medical system as 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth. It is important when receiving medical care that an individual feels not only safe but respected by their health care provider. In considering the theme of building communities of care, we wanted to further understand how the youth felt when accessing care at their most vulnerable, and in what ways did their experience as 2SLGBTQIA+ youth affect that.

Healthcare providers: doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, therapists, social workers, etc.

Sexual Education: High-quality teaching and learning about a broad variety of topics related to sex and sexuality. (I.e, Safer sex practices, preventing STIs and STDs, consent, legal rights and protections, further resources).

Questions

Do you have a family doctor or general practitioner?

Have you ever experienced barriers to accessing the healthcare you need or ask for as a 2SLGBTQIA youth? Have you been able to find supportive doctors or healthcare practitioners? How did you find a supportive healthcare provider?

How long is the commute to your nearest healthcare provider (How long do you have to travel, by car, by foot, or by transit otherwise?)

Are you aware of how to access gender-affirming care in your province? If so, how did you learn about it? (through a doctor, by researching, through an organization, or by word of mouth?)

Do you feel that you receive appropriate and well-developed 2SLGBTQIA+ sexual education in school? Do you know where to access sexual health care in your community?

Themes From Discussion 3: 2SLGBTQIA+ Healthcare

The participants discussed their difficulty with access to health care, even though the majority of them had primary care providers. Access to specialists and mental health care was limited due to a lack of providers in their area. When it came to navigating access to 2SLGBTQIA+ related health care, such as hormone replacement therapy, there was a lot of frustration with how difficult it was to access information about the process. Participants shared their experiences of having to piece together their own resources with extensive research.

Some of the youth expressed hesitancy in accessing health care due to being dead-named or not having their identity respected, despite having conversations with their health care providers.

A gap was identified in the ability to access gender affirming care. Many doctors would not engage in the conversation as preteens, encouraging the youth to wait until they were older. Once they reach around 16 years old, their doctors would be willing to make recommendations, but the wait list at the IWK Children's Hospital was roughly two years. This meant that by the time they were able to access health care at the children's hospital, they would be too close to aging out to actually start care, forcing them to wait until they are 18 to begin the process. This felt incredibly dismissive in the fact that they were left with very little autonomy over their bodies.

The majority of 2SLGBTQIA+ health care was concentrated within urban centers, meaning that the youth had to travel sometimes for several hours or had to leave the province in order to be able to access care. Finding 2SLGBTQIA+ friendly services, such as mental health care, were also restricted to cities like Halifax.

In Their Own Words:

“Where, you know I’ve not had many issues with the doctors themselves other than being uneducated And it's with therapy as well. It's very difficult to get any sort of specialist as they've all been in booked up in my area.”

“I've been trying to get on like HRT for about three to four years It's been really hard and I only this month got like the bare bones resources to just have access to it like the healthcare system pretty much just like everywhere is crazy and it takes so long”

“Yeah, one of my biggest problems is that I personally will not go to a doctor unless it's bad, bad, because I know I'm getting dead named and it's just not worth it. And I know that no matter how many times I correct the doctor, I'm still getting dead named.”

“And in Halifax, your options for HRT are pretty well IWK or Halifax Sexual Health. If you are like 16 or 17, you can't do that because the wait list for the IWK is too. So they will not put you on the list, and you cannot go to Halifax Sexual Health until you are older.”

“And it's also like when you're younger, it's not even a question. They won't think about it. You're a kid. You don't know what you're talking about. And then when you're still saying the same thing you've been saying since you were 13, they're like, oh, well, actually, you're too old for this and too young for this route.”

“Yeah, expanding on different kinds of healthcare providers, I have… a queer therapist. So very much a queer inclusive therapist as she's queer herself But she recently moved to Nova Scotia and we have to do virtual appointments, for example. I would prefer it in person.”

Conclusion

Through this workshop, the youth expressed consistent frustration with the lack of support and resources they were being given, whether it was in creating queer spaces, education, or healthcare. Each of the participants could identify that while the majority of their schools had progressive policies in place, there was an inability to enforce them in any meaningful way. These youth from two different provinces and several different communities were able to all share extremely similar experiences as 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. 2SLGBTQIA+ are not seeing themselves reflected in their communities and are having their experiences treated as an agenda or ideology that is still taboo to discuss in the classroom. Many schools have been grappling with the question around how to support queer and trans youth for the last decade, and it was disappointing to see that these youth were having the same conversations I (report writer) was having as a queer high school student in 2014.

A sentiment that was expressed several times was the desire to see queerness represented in their spaces. The youth wanted more access to queer adults and to have resources and information about the 2SLGBTQIA+ be available to them in their school communities. Key takeaways from this conversation have alot to do with building communities of care for all young people. The key takeaways from this workshop are:

- 2SLGBTQIA+ need more resources and education that reflects their life experience accessible to them. These resources should be readily available and displayed or shared in a way that does not attempt to hide the subject matter.

- The 2SLGBTQIA+ is not being reflected within our curriculum and is still being regulated to presentations or sex education. This further adds to stigma around the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and contributes to the feeling of “otherness” many queer people experience. If your community, their history, and your life experiences are only ever represented as a taboo subject it becomes very difficult to see a future for yourself.

- There is still a lot of work to be done when addressing bullying and discrimination within school settings. Anti-oppression education should be something that all youth receive and should be an ongoing conversation throughout their education.

- The inability for our institutions to stop the practice of dead naming needs to be addressed. Not being able to access government or health care services without the risk of being outed or dead named is incredibly limiting, and for many can affect their ability to access resources for years.

- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth need 2SLGBTQIA+ adults in their spaces. In order to support queer and trans youth it is important to ensure that service providers and educational institutions are working to create welcoming and safe environments for their queer and trans staff.

Thank you to the Shaking the Movers, the Landon Pearson Centre, and Carleton University for the support in hosting this workshop.