

**Re-Building the Relationship between OPS  
and the 2SLGBTQ+ Community:  
*Summary of Community Interviews***



*Prepared by  
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## A. Introduction

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The Ottawa Police Service (OPS) is committed to providing services for the 2SLGBTQ+ community in Ottawa that are responsive and respectful of the current needs in the community. Notwithstanding this commitment, there are serious concerns in the relationship between the 2SLGBTQ+ community and the police, and this is particularly true for certain parts of the community, notably Indigenous, racialized and gender diverse people.

In an effort to address these concerns and establish a more effective ongoing relationship, the OPS has engaged Catalyst Research and Communications to support the process of exploring some possible ways of moving forward in re-building this relationship. Catalyst has over 30 years of experience working in the community sector and with non-profit organizations, including in the 2SLGBTQ+ community, the Indigenous community and the immigrant community.

### Methodology

Catalyst conducted 14 interviews with a mixture of organizational representatives and individual activists in the 2SLGBTQ+ community in the early spring of 2020. This report does not provide a list of those interviewed, as some requested anonymity. Organizations included both “by and for” organizations rooted in the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and mainstream service providers who work extensively with the community, as well as individual activists and community members. Almost all organizations contacted agreed to an interview, while less than half of individuals contacted did so. Input was received from young, racialized, trans and Indigenous community members, although not to the extent that would have been preferred. This may have been partly due to the problematic relations currently between the police and these community members, and may also have been affected by the fact that there are few formally established organizations to represent them and who could engage in the interview process.

In October 2020, a draft of the report was shared with members of the Rainbow Service Providers Network for their comments and guidance.

This report provides some initial contextual comments, summarizes the input received through the interviews with community members and concludes with initial recommendations from the consultant.

## B. Context

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There has been a long and sometimes tragic history in the relationship of police services across Canada with the Indigenous community, trans individuals, racialized community members, street-involved youth and others in the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

Homosexuality was decriminalized in 1969, but harsh police responses continued in Canadian cities long after that time, and the 1970's and 1980's were difficult times. Violence crime against members of the queer community was common, and the community did not feel well protected by the police, including in Ottawa.

In 1975, the Ottawa Police Services arrested 17 men as part of the "Homosexual Vice Ring" investigation. The names, addresses and occupations of the 17 men arrested were released to the media. Although none of those arrested ended up serving jail time or were fined, nine either changed jobs or were fired or suspended from their jobs, and eight required psychiatric care because of the barrage of hate mail and calls they received. One of them, a 34-year-old public servant named Warren Zufelt, committed suicide.

On October 22, 1977, Montreal police officers armed with machine guns raided a gay bar called the Truax, and 147 men were charged under the bawdy house law.

Four bathhouses were raided by the Toronto Police Service in 1981, and 286 people were arrested. The event is now considered one of the crucial turning points in Canadian LGBT history, as an unprecedented community mobilization took place to protest police conduct.

Hate crimes haunted the LGBTQ community, including the 1985 murder of Kenneth Zeller in Toronto's High Park. In 1975, the Aquarius bathhouse in Montreal was firebombed. Three customers died in the resulting fire, and two of them are buried in anonymous graves because their bodies were never identified or claimed by their families. The perpetrators were never arrested.

Here in Ottawa in 1989, a straight man named Alain Brosseau was attacked by a gang of teenagers, who wrongly assumed he was gay, while walking home from his job at the Chateau Laurier. The attackers chased him through Major's Hill Park to the Alexandra Bridge, and then threw him off the bridge, resulting in his death. The outcry from the LGBT community eventually led to the formation of the Ottawa Police Services LGBT Liaison Committee two years later.

In 1991, a ground-breaking decision was made with the formation in Ottawa of Canada's first LGBT Police Liaison Committee, with members of the city's LGBT community and the OPS sitting down together at the same table. Members of the community who remember that time describe it as a breakthrough, in which the direct dialogue between the two parties led to dramatic changes in how the police treated members of the LGBTQ community. At about the same time, the OPS also set up Canada's first police unit specifically dedicated to the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes.

The changes in policing that resulted from these advances meant that many members of the LGBTQ community felt and continue to feel today considerably safer in our city than was the case in the 1970's and 1980's.

However, that sense of safety is not true for all members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community today. For some, the memory of those violent times still echoes. In particular, members of our community who are trans, Indigenous or racialized need the same level of safety as all residents of Ottawa.

For many years, the LGBTQ Liaison Committee of the OPS provided input to the OPS on behalf of the community. Over time, the representativeness of the committee, and community engagement and confidence in the committee began to decline.

In 2019, the OPS did a survey to gather input about the way forward. The feedback from the community, including a survey with responses from over 60 community members and 18 organizations, and input from Committee members, identified a number of challenges and opportunities in the relationship. As a result of that engagement a decision was made to end the LGBTQ Liaison Committee and move forward with a new relationship structure between the OPS and the 2SLGBTQ+ Ottawa community.

Informed by the community feedback about the Liaison Committee, the view emerged that the renewed relationship needs to focus on responding to the needs of the most vulnerable members in the 2SLGBTQ+ community and specifically community members who are Two-Spirited, racialized, trans and gender diverse, youth, and street involved.

The impact of the Liaison Committee in the 1990's and 2000's highlights that change is possible in the relationship between the 2SLGBTQ+ community and the OPS. Now, police practice needs to evolve once again, and many hope that there is the opportunity to re-build the relationship between OPS and the community, with a particular focus on ensuring a safe and respectful environment for gender diverse, racialized, Indigenous, immigrant and refugee, youth and street-involved members of the community.

*(Much of the historical information in this section comes from the Queer Canadian History Timeline published by the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity.)*

### **C. A New Relationship Structure for the OPS and the 2SLGBTQ+ Community**

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Some of the community members interviewed did not have a clear sense of what type of relationship mechanism(s) would be effective moving forward. For most, however, there was general agreement that some version of a council or committee or body of some kind was needed on an ongoing basis. There was some support for this entity being a sub-committee of the OPS Community Equity Council, which addresses the OPS relationship with the racialized, Indigenous and faith-based communities. However, the vast majority supported the idea of a separate entity that collaborates closely with the Community Equity Council.

#### **1. Mandate of the New Entity**

Many people emphasized that the new body needs to have a clear mandate and purpose. For some, there was confusion about the role of the Liaison Committee and this contributed to the lessening of its connection to the community. Regardless of the Liaison Committee experience, this clarity is imperative moving forward. Is this an advisory body to the OPS? Is it a collaborative body where community representatives and OPS reach agreement on key changes and actions?

Possible elements of the mandate that were suggested include:

- To hear and explore concerns from the community,

- To facilitate mutual learning between OPS and the 2SLGBTQ+ community (e.g. for the OPS to learn the skills and knowledge to effectively serve and protect 2SLGBTQ+ community members, and for community members to learn about police procedures and the options 2SLGBTQ+ members have in interacting with police),
- To develop concrete actions that can be undertaken to improve the relationship and enhance the quality of policing services to the 2SLGBTQ+ community,
- To periodically review and report to the community on progress on the actions identified.

Some mentioned that a collaborative approach and an emphasis on relationship-building will be key to achieving tangible results.

It will be important for the new body to develop clear action plans with measurable goals, outcomes and timelines, and to regularly assess progress on these. In this sense, the new body needs to have “a bias for action”.

The new body will also be expected to take an intersectional approach, recognizing that certain members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community face greater vulnerabilities in their interactions with police. Interviews repeatedly highlighted the need to focus on racialized, Indigenous, trans and gender diverse members of the community, refugees and newcomers, homeless or street-involved youth and sex workers. Working closely with the Community Equity Council will also be essential, as their mandate focuses on racialized, Indigenous and faith-based communities, and there may be areas where joint discussions or joint actions would be desired.

Questions were raised about the autonomy of the new body, and the importance of being able to put out their own statements and speak publically on issues related to the relationship between police and the 2SLGBTQ+ community. It may be helpful to have two bodies: a community body that can speak and act autonomously, and a joint body with the OPS.

Police members attending would need to have a strong orientation before coming to the table, to ensure they are able to hear the concerns without defensiveness, and to ensure a safe environment for community members participating.

## **2. Membership**

In general, the view was that the new body would have members from the OPS and the community. There was no real clarity about the proportionate representation: some thought that half community and half OPS was appropriate given the relationship-building intentions, while many did not express a particular view or indicated they had not given it sufficient thought to take a position at this time.

For the community members of the new body, the interviews repeatedly raised that the members need to include:

- a) representation of gender diverse, Two-Spirit, racialized, immigrant and youth community members and activists; this needs to be a significant proportion of the new entity, and more than one person from each of these groups;
- b) representation from key 2SLGBTQ+ organizations. There is an emerging coalition of several organizations (Capital Pride, AIDS Committee of Ottawa, Kind, Ten Oaks, Capital

Rainbow Refuge, MAX Ottawa, Ottawa Senior Pride Network) that is in the early stages of creation, and it is increasingly well known in the community – this coalition was suggested as the logical place to go for 2SLGBTQ+ organizational representation. Some people interviewed also felt that some trusted ally organizations serving the 2SLGBTQ+ community would be useful to have on the new body as well.

It was also suggested that someone on the new body with an academic background might help with supporting some of the policy discussions.

Those interviewed recognized that the OPS would name the OPS representatives on the body, however several expressed the hope that a senior leader would be appointed. At the very least, the new body needs a direct connection to the senior decision-making apparatus of the OPS. Some of those interviewed also suggested that it would be desirable to have 2SLGBTQ+ police officers on the new body, while others focused more on who would be appropriate because of their job responsibilities.

Some suggested co-chairs: one from the community and one from OPS. Others felt both co-chairs would come from the community. The Community Equity Council has one co-chair from the community and the other is the Deputy Chief of the OPS.

Community members would serve for a specified term (e.g. two years) and then rotate off. Terms would be staggered to ensure there was continuity and that not all community members left at the same time. It might be advisable to have OPS members rotate off the new body periodically as well.

### **3. Selection of the Members**

OPS members will be appointed by the OPS through their own decision-making process.

The process for selecting the community members of the new body was a particularly challenging point for interviewees to consider, and no clear preferred approach emerged. Various options were floated, including:

- a) Community elects the members: Some of those interviewed expressed concerns about whether some of the most qualified members would be elected, e.g. racialized or trans members. It was suggested that one way to address this would be to have a certain number of seats reserved for these groups. There are also logistical and fairness challenges associated with this option, for example, who gets to vote?
- b) Selection committee: This was the method for the selection of the Community Equity Council members, however it raises the question of who would be on the selection committee.
- c) Organizations in the 2SLGBTQ+ community appoint representatives: in particular, many people mentioned the emerging coalition of seven 2SLGBTQ+ community organizations.
- d) Partner with key organizations to name community members, e.g. Indigenous organizations would name Two-Spirit members, Gender Mosaic would be helpful in finding trans members.
- e) Anyone interested can participate (although it was acknowledged that this could very quickly get unwieldy).

- f) Combination of some of the above. For example, several people favoured a combined approach in which the organizations in the emerging coalition would name representatives to some of the seats, and a selection committee would choose community members at large for the rest of the seats. In both cases, this would be done with a view to ensuring a strong representation of racialized, trans or gender diverse and Two-Spirit community members.

#### **4. Operation of the new entity**

In order for discussions at the new body to be productive, it will be important to have a clear understanding of how the members are going to work together, and what the ground rules will be for the discussions and decisions. Good process is essential, in order to ensure all members have a voice, and that decisions are made in a good way. One suggestion was that it would be helpful to have a third party facilitate the meetings.

Community members will need clear information on how decisions are made in OPS, including the general process and timelines for decisions, and scope of authority of those participating on the new body. What scope of change is possible within the limitations (legal, structural, etc.) that OPS operates within? This will help avoid misunderstandings and unrealistic expectations.

The new body could set up working groups on specific tasks from time to time as needed. These would have a limited timeline for their work, and could also be a way to engage specific expertise from community members not on the main entity.

The new entity will need to be adequately resourced, which would include financial support for community members.

Overall, the new body needs to be transparent and accountable to the community, with regular two-way feedback and communication.

#### **D. Accountability and Engagement with the Community**

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It will be important for the new body to develop clear action plans with measurable goals and outcomes, and to check in regularly with community members to report on progress and gather guidance on further actions needed. There were several suggestions about how this engagement and accountability might happen, including:

- a) An open community meeting once a year (or possibly more often):
- Provide an update from the OPS 2SLGBTQ+ entity: what they are working on, actions recommended to the OPS, progress made on the action plan, etc.
  - Police would attend (not in uniform),
  - Chief would be in attendance, and share the work OPS has undertaken to improve relations with the community,
  - Gather feedback from community members,
  - Explain the ongoing avenues of communication open to community members: how to find information about what the new entity is working on, how

community members can have input, contact point for the new entity, contact point in OPS, etc.

- b) Survey community members at the beginning of the new body's work and then again periodically, to find out what the main concerns are and what action is needed.
- c) Maintain an online presence through the OPS website (some people referenced the Toronto Police Service website which apparently has a page specifically for LGBTQ+ news and information), and through social media. Reach out creatively, through social media feeds of community influencers.
- d) Attend community events to publicize the new entity, and promote ways of providing input.
- e) Engage with the wider community of service providers: YSB, women's shelters, homeless shelters, John Howard, Elizabeth Fry, faith-based groups that are open to 2SLGBTQ+ members, Community Health Centres, etc.
- f) Consider periodically undertaking a more in-depth engagement, such as the recent initiative by the City of Ottawa to determine service and program needs across the community.

## E. Issues of Concern

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When asked to identify what issues or concerns the new body needs to work on, some of the individuals interviewed used the opportunity to also mention positive aspects of the current relationship, and these included:

- New Chief has had a promising start, and his stated objectives represent an opportunity for change.
- Hiring of 100 new officers is an opportunity to significantly increase the number of 2SLGBTQ+ officers, racialized officers and Indigenous officers.
- The OPS Equity, Diversity and Inclusion action plan is a positive step, and its implementation could have a beneficial impact.
- Some offered specific examples of positive police intervention (e.g. an officer who talked down a trans man from a bridge).

The issues that the new entity needs to work on were identified as follows:

1. Safety for all members of 2SLGBTQ+ community is the paramount concern, and particularly safety for community members who are trans, Indigenous, racialized, immigrants or refugees, homeless/street-involved youth, or sex workers.
2. Recruitment of more police officers who are 2SLGBTQ+, more who are racialized, and more who are Indigenous. Changing the face of the OPS will facilitate change and self-reflection from within.
3. Training
  - Mandatory for all OPS
  - Direct interaction with members of the community to hear about their lived experience, including experiences with the police.
  - Understand intersectional, multi-dimensional identities of those in the 2SLGBTQ+ community.



- History of the relationship, back to the bath raids and violence of the 1980's and 1990's, and the reality that this history is still alive and present in the minds of many community members.
  - Systemic racism; understanding that racism is rarely overt or intentional.
  - Anti-oppression / anti-racist training.
  - Indigenous culture, the history of colonialism and intergenerational trauma, contemporary realities of Indigenous people (Millennium Scoop, Ottawa has highest concentration of Inuit outside the North, etc.)
  - Recent and contemporary history: person of colour killed in last two years by police, so trust is low.
  - Help OPS understand that some immigrants are anxious in the presence of police because of their experiences in their country of origin, and this may not be related to OPS actions at all, and to be patient and understanding of this.
  - Intimate partner violence (IPV) in the 2SLGBTQ+ community.
  - HIV community criminalized for not disclosing their HIV+ status to partners, and this has damaged relations with police.
  - Trauma-informed interactions with community members. Understand that PTSD and depression are common in some parts of the community, because of historical, systemic, ongoing oppression and marginalization.
4. Improved police protocols on working with the 2SLGBTQ+ community, e.g. when ID does not match appearance and preferred name, do not assume gender or pronouns, IPV situations, etc. Make police procedures more transparent; community members do not understand the process.
  5. Ensure there is accountability when mistakes are made or when members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community are not treated appropriately. This includes the role of supervision in the OPS: ensuring supervisors are equipped to deal with unhelpful behaviour related to the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and support learning and change among the officers who report to them. This also includes ongoing follow-through until the difficulties are corrected.
  6. Address the internal work environment from a workers' health and safety perspective. How OPS treats its staff internally affects how those staff treat community members. If the environment is hypermasculine, homophobic and racist, if it is a place of conformity where those who do not fit in are targeted, then this will influence how OPS members interact with members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. What are the supports available to OPS members for their mental and emotional well-being? Are those supports accessed? What are the barriers to accessing them? Are more steps needed to build healing relationships internally so police can build respectful relationships with the community?
  7. Changing the police culture: diversity inside the OPS means little without culture change. Structural problems with the police service are at the core. There are good officers but the structure is flawed.
  8. Online reporting: make reporting easier, change the gender categories to move beyond the male/female binary.
  9. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion plan: put more substance and detail into the outline of the plan, and follow the implementation.
  10. Identify and reinforce examples of positive behaviour by police and appropriate and helpful interactions with community members.

11. Community policing: is this positive? Is it over-policing? What are the best ways for frontline officers to work with the community?
12. How do you change the fundamental values of people? If someone cannot change, is it acceptable for them to remain as a police officer? How can they protect people if this is their view of them? How do you assess attitudes of the average police officer towards members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community?
13. Look at other police services that have developed a positive and effective relationship with the 2SLGBTQ+ community and learn from them. RCMP detachments in small communities may offer some useful examples in community relationship-building as well.
14. More robust role for police in blocking hate messages at Pride (like the buffer zone around abortion clinics).
15. Pride: opinions varied about whether this should be addressed soon, or whether OPS should continue to respect the wishes of some community members for another two or three years until progress has been made on other issues where agreement may be more possible. Actively engage officers on why it is important to some community members that OPS members not participate in uniform.
16. Designate a community contact point within OPS, where community members can go with questions or for information and navigation of OPS services. This would be an officer(s) who is 2SLGBTQ+ or who is 2SLGBTQ+ positive, is educated about the issues and is trauma-informed, in order to ensure the contact point is a safe place for community members. Community members have practical questions and do not know how to approach OPS for answers, such as:
  - My partner has threatened to go to the police and accuse me of domestic violence. Can they do that? Will they be believed? What will happen?
  - Is there a way I can inform the police of a hate incident without formally placing a complaint? Some incidents may not be crimes but I want the police to know about them.
  - I am being stalked. What can I do?
  - How do I lodge a complaint about treatment by an OPS officer?

Police need to understand that events that happen in other cities have an impact here. The news is carried from one city to another, so actions in Ottawa need to address the practices of OPS here in our community, and also the perceptions people have of the police based in part on what happens here and in part on what happens elsewhere.

It is also important to recognize the complexity of police work, that police officers are “quasi-social workers”. Moving ahead means being cognizant that there is a police perspective on these issues, be it police procedures, the training of officers, or whether LGBTQ officers march in the Pride Parade in uniform.

## **F. Conditions for Success**

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One individual proposed that there are three key conditions for the success of this new entity, and, as they are highly consistent with comments heard from many others, they are presented here:

- a) Credible and knowledgeable members of the new body. Both community and OPS members of the new body need to be individuals who have the credibility and influence to effect change in their respective spheres,
- b) Transparent and accountable, with regular reporting to the community and openness to feedback and direction from community members,
- c) Concrete change happens: community members understand that achieving change will take time, but steady progress is needed.

## **G. Moving Forward: Some Possible Starting Points**

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Those interviewed had a wide range of suggestions for what might be next steps in moving forward to build an improved relationship between OPS and the 2SLGBTQ+ community:

1. Community listening circles: Hold a series of small gatherings with community members where police representatives can hear firsthand the concerns and suggestions. It may be useful to have one with each of the key communities, e.g. racialized, Indigenous, trans and gender diverse, street-involved youth. These need to be carefully structured and well facilitated to ensure safety, respect and openness. Police attending need to be prepared to listen with an open heart. The listening circles could be cohosted with a trusted community organization.

These were seen as trust-building opportunities, where community members could begin to feel that they were being heard by the OPS. In this sense, the people who recommended them see them as a precursor to other actions, such as a community town hall.

2. Communication about the winding up of the Liaison Committee: a number of people are unclear that the Liaison Committee has been closed, and this is important information preparatory to considering a new body of some kind.
3. Release the results of the community survey about the Liaison Committee.
4. Release the consultant's report from the interviews.
5. Police Chief and possibly one or two other senior OPS leaders meet with the coalition to have a frank talk and discuss action moving forward, similar to meetings the Chief has held with other community groups (e.g. Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women).
6. Meet with the coalition to review the consultant's report and gather guidance about the next steps.
7. Police Chief speak publicly about the relationship with the 2SLGBTQ+ community:
  - Acknowledge the history of the relationship, that members of the community suffered injustices and discrimination.
  - Acknowledge the work of the Liaison Committee and the progress that has been made over the last 20-30 years.

- Acknowledge the current concerns of the community and particularly, the need to ensure trans, racialized, indigenous and street-involved youth who are members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community are treated with respect and dignity.
  - Announce that he is not marching in uniform in the Pride Parade.
  - Make a commitment to action, and a commitment to report regularly to the community on progress.
8. Hold focus groups with service providers and ally organizations, and with OPS officers to gather their input.
  9. Community gathering or town hall:
    - Acknowledge the contribution of the Liaison Committee and thank its members.
    - Present consultant's report summarizing the interviews.
    - Highlight the EDI plan and the hiring of 100 new officers as an opportunity to recruit more 2SLGBTQ+ members into the OPS. Many community members are not aware of these initiatives.
    - Seek community input on several key questions about the new entity and relationship going forward.
    - Police would attend, not in uniform.
  10. Hire someone from the community into OPS to oversee the transition to a new entity.

## H. Consultant's Observations

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Many ideas about how to re-build the relationship were surfaced in the interviews with community members, and what is needed next is a process to consider these and other ideas and begin to move towards general agreement on a new body or a new process that can re-build the relationship.

The 2SLGBTQ+ community shares profound concerns about institutionalized racism, and the particular barriers faced by racialized, Indigenous and Two-Spirit, trans and gender diverse, immigrant and refugee, and street-involved community members. In the months since the community interviews, there has been a surge in public support around the world for the Black Lives Matter movement, including here in Ottawa. Many anti-racism activists in Ottawa highlighted anti-Indigenous racism alongside anti-Black racism. OPS Chief Peter Sloly has publically acknowledged the presence of systemic racism in the OPS, and this acknowledgement was followed by a series of incidents highlighting resistance to the changes needed to address systemic racism in the OPS, including an anonymous video attacking Chief Sloly.

There is a certain level of fatigue in the 2SLGBTQ+ community about dealing with the OPS. Many feel that the community has provided numerous suggestions about the changes needed, and how to repair the relationship, including those recounted in this report. Others have concluded that the level of effort needed to effect change in the OPS is so significant compared with the likely results that their energy is better invested in systemic change elsewhere, such as in health care or education. In many senses, the ball is now in the OPS court, and the responsibility to take the next steps lies with the OPS.

In light of this, the consultant recommends that OPS:

1. Release this report to the community.
2. Review the possible actions that arose from the community interviews and select those that the OPS feels can move ahead at this time. Share this preliminary plan with the community as a basis for feedback, discussion and action.

## **I. In Closing**

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The people interviewed often emphasized that this process of change will not be easy or simple. It requires a great deal of emotional work. The OPS needs to understand that it is going to be slow and messy and feel uncomfortable – and that this is an inevitable part of the process.

*“It will be very imperfect, parts of it will not go well, and some parts will feel scary and overwhelming. Keep going.”*