



TWO SPIRIT CIRCLE OF EDMONTON (TSCE) SOCIETY

- - - PRESS RELEASE - - -

Two Spirit Organization Denied By Their Own and the City of Edmonton!

The Two Spirit Circle of Edmonton Society has been overlooked, forgotten or just downright denied inclusion in the latest edition of "A Guide To Aboriginal Edmonton". What motivated the omission of the fact of our existence and our contact information is bewildering given the fact that our President, Richard Jenkins, used to sit on the Edmonton Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee (EAUAC) for close to two years as a very openly Two Spirit (gay) man and had many times taken the opportunity to speak very candidly about the Two Spirit Circle and the work it was doing. "People know of us in the city and seem to be very selective about what they choose to involve and include us in, which is little", says Ed Lavallee, cultural advisor for the Circle.

"The omission, I believe, is just another unconscious impact and outcome of colonization where some parts of our culture are remembered and celebrated while other parts are still forgotten or outright denied because the selective recall of a few misguided leaders doesn't allow for full remembrance. Pain, fear, shame and guilt, most often unconscious, is still a powerful tool of colonization and it appears to be in full gear with the group of individuals responsible for guiding the design, development and implementation of the Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Accord Initiative. Two Spirit peoples and our place in Nehiyaw culture and history in the Edmonton area is beginning to build momentum and we see this 'oversight' as a bump in our road to a full return to the Nehiyaw circle of life. We give thanks to all the individuals who were responsible for the Guide for forgetting us and by doing so providing us this distinct opportunity to speak our own truth", says Mr. Jenkins. "We've been overlooked, forgotten, denied, bashed, beaten, murdered or ridiculed for too long and it's time to stop and the only way that'll get accomplished is by taking responsibility for ourselves. Indigenous communities throughout the Americas can no longer keep their heads in the sand about the importance of Two Spirit peoples - we need each other as much, if not more, now than we ever did before." A 1994 Health Canada report on suicide indicates that being Aboriginal or Two Spirited (gay, lesbian, transgendered, bisexual, transexual, intersexed) are two significant risk factors for suicide. Two Spirited peoples are both and it is estimated that up to 30% of teen suicides are related to sexual orientation or gender issues.

Although many members of the Two Spirit Circle agree that the oversight was probably not intentional or on purpose, there remains a perceived, and subtle, homophobia and heterosexism that still stings nonetheless. "In this world, we're taught by our Elders and our teachers that we're supposed to treat each other with compassion and respect in how we relate to each other even in awkward situations", shares Ruth Morin, former Chief Executive Officer of the Nechi Training, Research and Health Promotions Institute. "I understand about awkwardness when parents of children who are Two Spirited continue to deny their child's sexual orientation and extend this basic denial into their professional lives so that organizations like the Two Spirit Circle get 'overlooked'."

Efforts to contact any of the staff or consultants at the Accord's Edmonton office were unsuccessful as they were attending an Accord Executive Council meeting today. The Two Spirit Circle of Edmonton Society is a non-profit organization aimed at repatriating and enhancing our traditional roles in Indigenous communities while creating supportive environments within all societies for contemporary Two Spirit peoples. The Circle does not enjoy the luxury of core funding and relies totally on the efforts of a volunteer Board of Directors and the kindness of others.

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