



2023/24

ANNUAL REPORT

Fyrefly

Institute for Sexual and Gender Diversity

Housed in the University of Alberta’s Faculty of Education, the **Fyrefly Institute for Gender and Sexual Diversity (Fyrefly Institute)**, formerly known as the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services (ISMSS), provides direct services and leads ground breaking research that affects policy development, intervention, education and community outreach for 2SLGBTQ+ people.

Bringing together research, teaching, wellness services, and community outreach under one umbrella enables us to combine our studies and services in ways that create opportunities for innovative intellectual work and sustained educational and community outreach.

Our advocacy and research not only helps youth at large, but also guides professional development and education for teachers, social workers, family physicians, psychologists, guidance counsellors and other caring professionals, enabling them to be better resources and advocates for 2SLGBTQ+ youth and their families.

MISSION

Fyrefly works to create a society where all queer and trans people are free of discrimination. Through our education programs, research, policy development, advocacy, and community services, we strive to:

- Empower the 2SLGBTQ+ community to thrive
- Build leaders, particularly among youth
- Build public awareness and allyship
- Advance sexual and gender diversity studies to the forefront
- Create hope

We are unique in that we utilize research to inform our services, and our services drive the direction of our research, which often involve community partnerships.

RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY

Current research projects include:

- Social Innovation Lab – Camp fYrefly Outcomes (in partnership with the University of Saskatchewan)
- Journey Mapping Across Canada – Black LGBTQ+ Justice, Sexual, & Mental Health (In partnership with Ribbon Rouge Foundation)
- Outcomes Evaluation - CHEW Project (In partnership with MacEwan University)
- 2SLGBTQ+ Entrepreneurship Hub - A massive national project with a three research approach: traditional peer reviewed research, community-based research, and the scoping review that are focusing on identifying who to LGBTQ entrepreneurs are in Canada and what are the experiences that they have had.
- Queering Human Rights Advocacy - The Fyrefly Institute took part in the Faculty of Education's Celebration of Socially Transformative Research and Teaching poster presentation event. We presented a research poster showcasing multiple research projects that aimed to advance the wellness and rights of 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Fyrefly offers a variety of innovative programs and services, including:

- **Family Resilience Project:** We utilize a holistic model to provide mental health counselling services to 2SLGBTQ+ youth and their families and caregivers by offering free therapy with registered mental health professionals and also provides integrated supports and services. In 2023, the Family Resilience Project offered over 100 hours of free counselling.
- **Camp Fyrefly:** A national leadership and wellness camp for 2SLGBTQ+ youth that focuses on their individual needs, socialization, health, and wellness as well as ways to help youth grow into resilience. Camp fYrefly returned to in-person day camps in 2023. A total of 88 people participated in Camp Fyrefly North Alberta in 2023, of those 45 were campers, and 43 were volunteers and workshop presenters.
- **Fyrefly in Schools (FINS)** An anti-homo/bi/transphobia education program for all students, teachers, and staff in K-12 schools. In 2023, 140 presentations were offered to 6,100 participants, including 2,604 teachers.

- **Where the Rivers Meet (WTRM):** A project that grew out of the need to address systemic discrimination, which eventually developed into an educational initiative through fYrefly in Schools. WTRM supports and celebrates Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer folks through culturally relevant teachings based on Indigenous ways of knowing. Our Coordinator, Rae Madge, served over 1500 participants in workshops and events in 2023/2024.
- **Community, Health, Empowerment & Wellness (CHEW) Project:** CHEW provides a safe environment and free, frontline support for 2SLGBTQ+ youth and young people from 14 to 29, who face barriers. These barriers include mental health, poverty, houselessness, substance use, sexual health, and more. Some services offered at CHEW include counselling, crisis intervention, Indigenous Peer Support, and drop-in for basic needs (e.g. clothing) and support. The CHEW family has over 270 youth registered.
- **University of Alberta Pride Week:** Pride Week engages UAlberta's campus communities to come together to build supportive, caring, and respectful campus environments for 2SLGBTQ+ students, staff, and faculty. In 2024, Pride Week was held on Monday, March 11 to Friday, March 15. 13 events were hosted, which included a highly attended Pride Parade and Drag Show.
- **Mayor's Pride Brunch:** The 2024 Pride Brunch celebrated the Institute's 20th anniversary. It was held at the Edmonton Convention Centre. Three scrolls were generously presented to the Institute in recognition of our advocacy over the past twenty years. The scrolls were presented by notable community leaders, MP Randy Boissonnault, MLA Janis Irwin, MLA David Shepherd and their colleagues, and Mayor Amarjeet Sohi and Edmonton's City Councillors. The event also included remarks from the Institute's staff, Evan Westfal, Glynnis Lieb, Rae Madge, and Tay Lamoureux. The event was emceed'd by Fyrefly's Communications and Events Coordinator, Yasmine Abdel Razek. Approximately 300 guests attended to support Fyrefly.
- **Alberta GSA Conference:** An annual conference that offers educational workshops and presentations on 2SLGBTQ+ topics to students and teachers. It provides students with vital resources, resiliency skills, and access to safer spaces. In 2024, participants travelled as far as 357 km to attend. 12 school districts were represented, which included 75 students as well as 13 teachers and caring professionals. 52% of youth were rurally located.

→ PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

Highlights of some major activities from the past year include:

- **CHEW Project:** Our CHEW Outpost moved to a new space in 2023 and we hosted a Happy Hologays Mixer as an open house for the community to visit the space. CHEW is also now offered through our partnership with Boyle Street Community Services and Youth Empowerment & Support Services.
- **Camp Fyrefly:** Our Alberta North location had the opportunity to host campers overnight at a campsite in July 2023.
- **Fyrefly Monthly Events:** The Fyrefly team continued offering themed monthly events on the University of Alberta North Campus and expanded to host events within the Edmonton community, as a means to connect with students on campus and also our 2SLGBTQ+ community and allies in the Edmonton area.
- **Pride UA Merchandise Fundraiser:** We continued offering our fundraising initiative with the University of Alberta Bookstore at Pride Week 2024 and at our 2024 Mayor's Pride Brunch.
- **Fyrefly Scholarships:** We offer scholarships for University of Alberta graduate students focused on 2SLGBTQ+ research, leadership activities, and community service.
- **Brite line:** We continued our partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association -- Edmonton Chapter for the accredited 24-hour crisis support line.

OUR PEOPLE

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FIND OUT MORE

Visit uab.ca/fyrefly for detailed information about our research, programs and services

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