



2024/25

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)
- Outcomes Evaluation - CHEW Project (In partnership with MacEwan University)
- 2SLGBTQ+ Entrepreneurship Hub - A large scale national project with a three research approach: traditional peer reviewed research, community-based research, and the scoping review that are focusing on identifying who LGBTQ entrepreneurs are in Canada and what are the experiences that they have had.

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 2024, 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 2024, Fyrefly entered into a partnership with Children Services and the Centre for Sexuality to provide capacity building to Family Resource Networks across Alberta.
- **Rural Fyrefly in Schools** provided education to over 1000 participants across Alberta and Canada, including at post-secondary institutions, training for teachers, in K-12 classrooms, and support to organizations that directly serve communities. Highlights include organizations in the Town of High Level, Alberta, holding the town's first ever Pride Event as a direct result of participating in Rural Fyrefly in Schools workshops, and the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition's national panel discussion on Bodily Autonomy featuring our Program Coordinator.
- **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. Students and teachers travelled from all around Alberta to attend the conference in Edmonton. Approximately 150 people attended the one day conference.

- **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.

Where the Rivers Meet provided education to over 1600 participants across Alberta, including at post-secondary institutions, training for teachers, and support to organizations that directly serve communities. Our Program Coordinator was featured as a Keynote Speaker at the Align Association of Community Services' annual Conference in January 2025, delivering a presentation on Two-Spirit/Indigiqueer support and celebration to over 250 attendees.
- **Community, Health, Empowerment & Wellness (CHEW) Project:** Fyrefly partners with Boyle Street Community Services in Edmonton to provide a safe environment and free, frontline support for 2SLGBTQI+ 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 YEG family has over 270 youth registered.

In 2024, we began offering **CHEW YYC** service in Calgary. Located in the CommunityWise space, our local Lead and community liaisons have begun offering basic supports, supplies and referrals to resources for 2SLGBTQI+ youth in the Calgary area.
- **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 2025, Pride Week took place from March 10-18, 2025, as part of the larger YEG Campus Pride Network celebration. The week included events such as a Pride March, a drag show and resource fair, film screenings, and a Pride vs Prejudice film and panel hosted by the U of A Law.
- **Mayor's Pride Brunch:** The 2025 Pride Brunch was held at the Starlite Room. The event was attended by federal, provincial, and municipal politicians, as well as funders, University of Alberta staff, and public supporters of the Institute. The event featured local drag performers and stories from Fyrefly youth alum. We held a second friends and family appreciation event at Evolution Wonderlounge's new Jasper Ave location. This event was more accessible costwise and featured local drag performers.

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 Holigays 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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