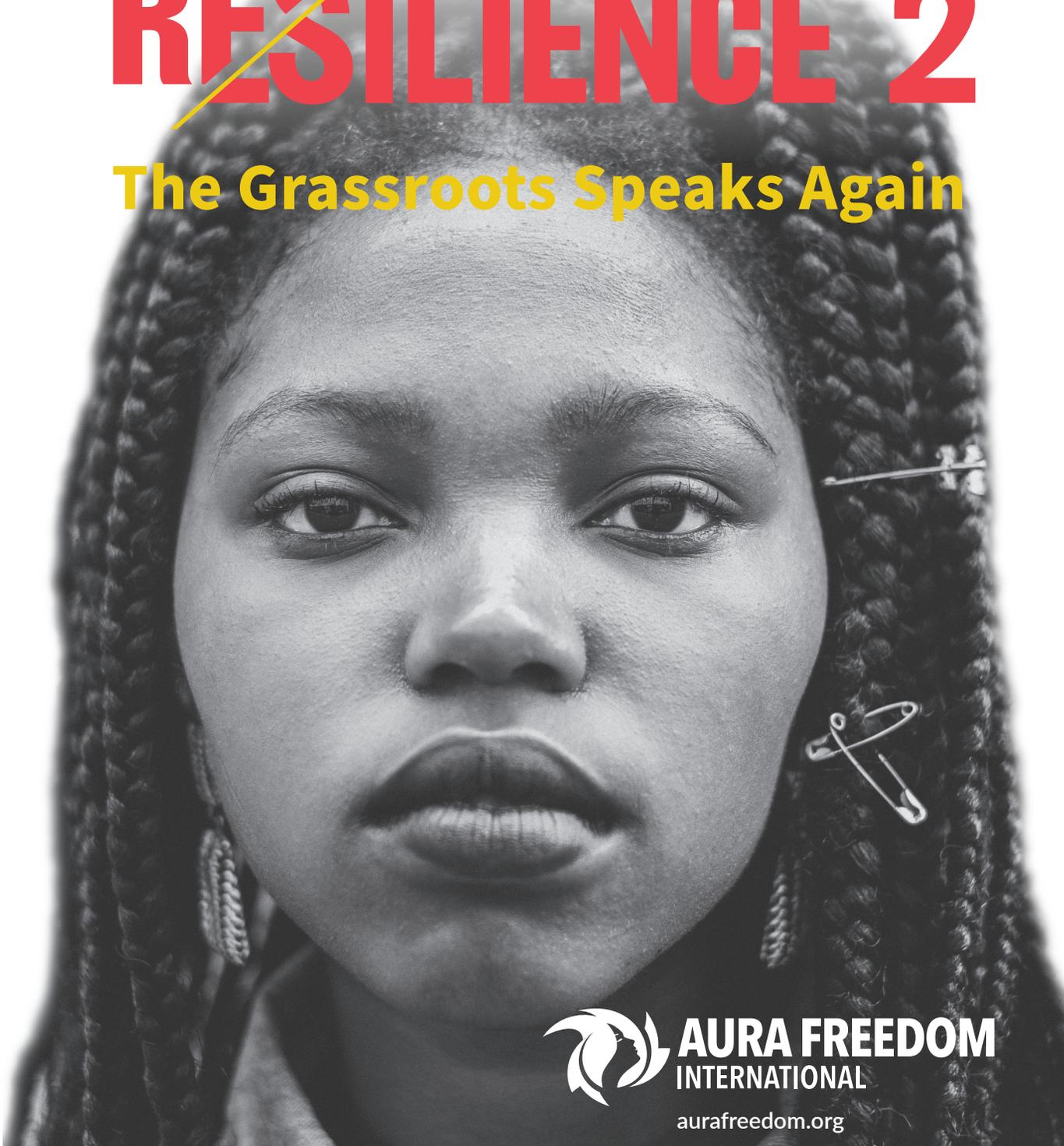




RELENTLESS RESILIENCE 2

The Grassroots Speaks Again



 **AURA FREEDOM**
INTERNATIONAL
aurafreedom.org



AURA FREEDOM INTERNATIONAL

Freedom from violence for women and girls

Aura Freedom is a grassroots, intersectional feminist organization working in Canada and internationally to end gender-based violence through advocacy and education.

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Relentless Resilience 2

The Grassroots Speaks Again - A Community Consultation on the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence in Canada

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Land Acknowledgement

Aura Freedom would like to acknowledge the land upon which we work, which are the traditional territories of the Huron-Wendat, the Anishinabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, “Tkaronto” (Toronto) is still home to many Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island. We are thankful for the opportunity to work toward the eradication of gender-based violence on these territories.

As we acknowledge this Indigenous land, we must also acknowledge that nobody on Turtle Island experiences gender-based violence at the rate and in the ways that Indigenous women do. And that violence has been, and continues to be, used as a tactical weapon of genocide and colonialism. We want to honour all of our Indigenous colleagues and dear friends who have played a huge part in the Relentless Resilience initiative. You will always have our respect and support.

DEDICATED TO THE GRASSROOTS, BRAVE AND RESILIENT AS ALWAYS.

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Content Warning

The following report contains subject matter that some readers may find distressing, including descriptions of gender-based violence and descriptive experiences of sexism, racism, and transphobia. Take care of yourself when reading. Self-care, love, bravery, and resiliency to all.

While Aura Freedom prefers the term survivor when referencing people who have experienced violence, the word victim can be found in this report when referencing data or police activity.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

In 2020, Aura Freedom released its Relentless Resilience report with specific calls to action and recommendations to Canadian leadership on how to eradicate the national emergency of gender-based violence. The report outlined the urgent need for a **National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence**, and was a sobering look at the effects of gender-based violence on all aspects of life in Canada. It was written as a Parallel Report for the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

In January 2021, the Government of Canada recognized the need for a National Action Plan, after years of advocacy from the women's sector.

In February and March 2021, Aura Freedom (in partnership with the Federal Government's **Office of Women and Gender Equality Canada** and **YWCA Canada**) held community consultations with grassroots gender-based violence organizations and survivors to hear more of their recommendations, suggestions and insight in regards to the National Action Plan.

Aura Freedom's goals for these community consultations were clear

- To have grassroots voices heard and respected.
- To achieve a country free of gender-based violence.
- To present concrete recommendations to the Government of Canada that will help empower our communities and change Canada and the world as we know it.

Below are our findings from these consultations and meetings. Our 'snapshot' of grassroots voices in Toronto is a rich and diverse one - participants came from survivor-led organizations, newcomer organizations, shelters, Indigenous organizations, LGBTQ2S+ groups, as well as survivors of violence and exploitation, single mothers, rural educators, trauma counsellors, Gender-based violence experts, clinicians, advocates, activists, and more.

This consultation process cemented one fact - none of these recommendations are new. In fact, we have summarized many of these exact points in our 2020 Relentless Resilience report. We are grateful to have heard our partners share their frustrations and expertise as they highlighted the many avenues in which systemic barriers to end Gender-based violence can be addressed. Furthermore, the solutions that our partners have brought forward are easily implemented, with decisive action and appropriate funding.

This consultation process reaffirmed to us that in situations of need, **The Grassroots'** creativity and relentless drive will always bring us hope.

Lesson learned:

- We are not waiting anymore.**
- We are moving forward, relentlessly.**
- You are more than welcomed to join us.**

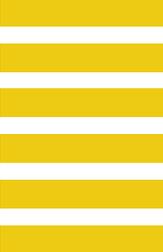
METHODOLOGY

This report was created during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. Through online meetings and discussions with different stakeholders from the GBV sector and the women's sector, our participants were given the freedom and space to bring forth their suggestions and recommendations on ending gender-based violence in Canada. We have done our very best to include each and every point mentioned during the meetings and include as many voices as we could within the given time frame and within our capacity.

As with many summary reports, there are different views and opinions shared here. Each individual recommendation is by no means a collective recommendation of all participants. However, there were many, many moments of collective solidarity and many of the same themes were repeated and echoed throughout the consultation process.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CONSIDERATIONS



We would like to acknowledge all of the frontline workers, grassroots organizers, feminists, activists, and survivors who contributed to this report with brilliance and passion. We respectfully and gratefully acknowledge all of your beautiful and relentless work to support women, girls and gender diverse people in your communities.

Relentless Resilience 2 is by no means a complete picture of every grassroots organization addressing gender-based violence in Canada. On the contrary, this is the tip of the iceberg. Due to time limitations and funding restraints, our area of interest is limited to Toronto, while recognizing the increased struggles of women, girls, and gender diverse people living in rural and remote areas of Ontario and Canada. Due to the same limitations of time and funding, not all forms of gender-based violence, nor all marginalized groups of women, are analyzed in this report. We have strived and will continue to strive to include as many voices and experiences as our capacity permits.

Relentless Resilience 2 represents diverse views and opinions of women's rights and human rights organizations in Canada and all contributors participated of their own free will.

The suggestions and recommendations here are a reflection of The Grassroots, who will always be the real experts in gender-based violence and the true indicators of how we are all doing as a collective society.

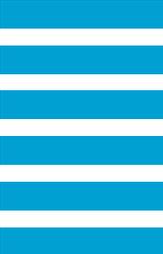


THANK YOU

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South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO)
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The Dandelion Initiative
The I DO! Project for Forced Marriage
Trans Pride Toronto
Toronto Counter Human Trafficking Network
Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Women Against Rape
White Ribbon
Women Focus Canada
Women's Habitat Domestic Violence Shelter
Survivors of gender-based violence who wish to remain anonymous



INTRODUCTION



A Note From Aura Freedom

We are very grateful for this opportunity to share this summary of Aura Freedom's grassroots consultations with the gender-based violence sector, which can be seen as an addendum to our [2020 Beijing +25 Parallel Report entitled Relentless Resilience](#), which highlights Grassroots Excellence and a host of calls to action and recommendations for a National Action Plan to end GBV (Gender-based violence).

During the consultations, our partners shared their feelings of passion, anger, frustration, but also hope and excitement.

Will The Grassroots finally be taken seriously?

We certainly hope so because our lives depend on it.

For women in Canada who experience violence in their homes, every day is an emergency. Every day is life or death. For these women and their children, the COVID-19 crisis presented complex health risks that went beyond the disease itself.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres called the global surge in domestic violence due to country lockdowns "horrifying".

He's right.

But the truth is, gender-based violence has always been horrifying. And now, with governments mandating social distancing and self-isolation, countless women and girls are even more isolated as they are asked to remain in the very place that is the most dangerous for them: HOME.

Grassroots feminist organizations knew what was coming. For some women, the lockdowns would mean increased frequency and severity of the violence they endure. For youth, it would mean experiencing increased online sexual exploitation and harassment. Fear, anxiety and economic pressure amount to increased household stress, with women bearing the brunt of it while trapped in abusive homes. Moreover, with schools, workplaces, restaurants, and community programs closed, women and their children have fewer places to turn to for refuge.

Every day, women's shelters and rape crisis centres in Canada see three women leave, and another three women show up. Why?

Why is violence against women still happening?

How can we address the root causes of violence to prevent it, as opposed to solely responding to it - many times, when it is too late.

For years, the gender-based violence sector, women, and communities have been screaming. We have clearly told governments what we need to address gender-based violence, often being met with inaction and indifference. Charities and community organizations are expected to partner on projects, but the same does not seem to apply to political parties - at the expense of our well-being.

And now we have, once again, shared what is needed in Canada's future National Action Plan to end gender-based violence. We must be met with decisive action and support. Governing bodies must utilize this knowledge they have asked from us - knowledge that is often painful to share.

So we challenge you.

We challenge you to do what is right and hear our calls to action.

We challenge you to take our insights, our expertise, our hearts, the deaths of our mothers and sisters, our blood and tears.

You have our hearts now; do not ignore them.

Do not let our work, our pain, our lives, our Relentless Resilience be in vain.

Sincerely,

The Aura Freedom team



This consultation process reaffirmed to us that in situations of need, **The Grassroots'** creativity and relentless drive will always bring us hope.

01

Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirit Peoples

WHAT THE GRASSROOTS SAID

Indigenous community members - from staff members at Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto (NWRCT) to individual consultants, experts, and healers - have made one thing clear: nothing is new.

They note that the following recommendations have been repeated in everything from community calls to action, to the inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit peoples. The subsequent frustrations that have been shared with us are a consequence of continued inaction, disrespect, indifference, and colonialism.

Our Indigenous partners (and friends) wanted to highlight what we have heard time and time again: **Nothing for us, without us. Nothing about us, without us.** Indigenous communities are experts in their own lived experiences and solidarity movements - they need seats at every table and must be driving initiatives such as these very consultations.

Indigenous communities and individual experts have provided their insight, experiences, and histories time and time again without being heard. Indigenous communities are frustrated, and rightfully so. The MMIWG2S report has gone nowhere and instead only retraumatized those who contributed.

When will Indigenous communities matter enough to be heard?

Some of the recommendations are simple:

- include us in all processes,
- let us heal our own communities in our own ways
- utilize the information you have gathered from us instead of simply putting it on a shelf to collect dust
- teach the history of Indigenous-settler relationships to foster understanding.

Our Indigenous partners have said, it is time to stop taking from Indigenous communities and utilize the gifts they have given us - and those that have been taken - over countless consultations, reports, inquiries, etc. They have told us that we must listen to what they are saying. If we do not, we perpetuate violence and colonialism.

"We are not asking for permission anymore, I think that's the greater message." - Mary Ann Shoefly, Healer at Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto

Indigenous-Led Movement - Worldview and Perceptions

- Some of our participants highlighted that we must create and maintain pathways for communities of different Indigenous Worldview and Perspectives, especially that of different Indigenous communities on Turtle Island. These worldviews should be the basis for actions that will result in lasting change for all. These worldviews are the basis for not only solidarity, but for societal change.
- We must take the information from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and immediately enact the recommendations from their Calls To Action
- Participants suggested that the system could mirror the medicine wheel where Elders, children, youth, and adults have their place. There are roles and balances within, where the social infrastructure is based on respect, sharing, community, and understanding.
- Indigenous community members, as represented by NWRCT, spoke of the issue regarding continuous consultations that neglect culturally-safe perspectives where the diversity of Indigenous communities are not represented and often added in as an afterthought.



Priorities for Indigenous Survivors

- *"The [MMIWG2S] inquiry ripped opened the hearts and souls of the community and it then went on hold, which only serves to reinforce the issues and system that allows genocide and MMIWG2S to thrive."* - Pamela Hart, Executive Director of Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto
- *"An issue is there was a lot of funding that could have been spent better [for MMIWG2S]. A lot of money could have been used in other ways. Other ways such as having healing for the families. They didn't even set up proper aftercare from that inquiry. Families were left raw, people in vicarious stages of trauma, vomiting in a forum, parents vomiting because they couldn't handle it and people were only given a 1-800 helpline."* - Bridget Perrier, co-founder of Sex Trade 101 and currently working with Indige-Spheres
- All recommendations from the MMIWG2S Inquiry Final Report must be implemented and a separate National Action Plan to end violence against Indigenous women, girls and Two Spirit peoples must be urgently created in partnership with Indigenous communities from across Canada*
- *Note that a National Action Plan was released on June 7 2021, after this report was written.
- All systems and institutions, especially the police and RCMP, must have cultural-sensitivity training to understand the history and basic core knowledge of the realities experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit peoples. Systemic changes that ignore how racism is intertwined into the fabric of social structures will not be successful; by ignoring the history and root causes of Indigenous oppression and violence, the necessary societal shifts will not happen.
- For Survivors: Indigenous community members, as represented by NWRCT, spoke of the issue regarding continuous consultations that neglect culturally- safe perspectives where the diversity of Indigenous communities are not represented and often added in as an afterthought.

Dual Indigenous Identities

- Participants highlighted the need to recognize dual Indigenous identity and the intersections of these communities
- *"[Focus] not just on our common identities as Indigenous and Settler or Indigenous and Black but there's so many other Indigenous such as dual or even multiple identities that need to be recognized. It also needs to be understood that like many other cultures and races, we're not just that umbrella term, we're not all the same - and that goes not just for Indigenous communities, that goes for every community! It's important to understand this because that's going to help with the healing process and it's going to help with the grounding of the person who's been victimized and those who are perpetrators, but this also [this lack of nuance] contributes to these systems and this lack of understanding between Indigenous perspective or Black perspective or any other racialized perspective is the fact that a lot of our young men, because of these systems, are groomed to groom. And so how do we mitigate that and how do we stop that? [We must address these issues] systematically - and society - learning and recognizing what the history is so that we're not further perpetuating this moving forward."* - Melissa Compton, Indigenous Educator, former Gender-based violence frontline worker/Indigenous youth worker

2SLGBTQI+ Folks in Indigenous Communities

- Community members spoke of their visions of a world free of trans-, homo- and Two Spirit phobia.

- Colonialism, gender inequality, and systemic racism are the roots of violence and the erasure of Two Spirit and trans folks.
- Respect and justice must be given to those who are living now, not only those who have passed from this world due to 2SLGBTQI+ violence.
- Trans and Two Spirit folks are often left out of the conversations and the violence they experience is nuanced, unique, and systematic. Bring them to the table.

Indigenous Sex Workers

- Members of the Indigenous sex worker community felt that they were left out of the MMIWG2S Inquiry and noted that the practice of silencing and ignoring the reality that sex workers face must be recognized.

Education

- Participants stated that the effects of colonization and genocide must be taught in schools and through public education campaigns. This education must be embedded in all school curricula, from pre-school to post-secondary, and in partnership with Indigenous communities and organizations who will be funded appropriately to take on this work.
 - Participants noted that Indigenous families must be prioritized in decolonial education to address issues of internalized colonization.
 - *"We need to recognize what colonization did to us and prepare our children with knowledge to navigate the world"* - Bridget Perrier, co-founder of Sex Trade 101 and currently working with Indige-Spheres
- Participants stated that consent must be introduced to young children.
- Healthy relationships must be taught in a culturally-based manner.
- Participants stated that appropriate education materials from Indigenous communities, such as authors and artists, can be utilized in partnership.
- Participants stated that culturally-informed and sensitive education must start with children in schools with guest speakers, experts, and those with lived experiences. This must be implemented and embedded in the curricula of pre-school, primary, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions.
- Participants stated that families must be educated, whether through parenting workshops or hands-on education.
- Participants stated that land-based teachings and activities must be made readily available for Indigenous youths in their own communities. Land-based teachings for families incorporate empowering cultural teachings from history up to the present and have been found to be successful healing practices for survivors and victims of gender-based violence .
- Participants stated that public awareness campaigns on gender-based violence must include the history of Indigenous peoples and be made available in many different media forms, including advertisements, traditional and social media, etc.
- Participants gave an example of dismantling unhealthy gender norms by showcasing role models such as firewomen and men as nurses.
- For Education: Indigenous community members, as represented by NWRCT, spoke of the issue regarding continuous consultations that neglect culturally- safe perspectives where the diversity of Indigenous communities are not represented and often added in as an afterthought.



01

Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirit Peoples

A Call to Action from Indigenous Healers

- Indigenous Healers asked for Section 35 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to be respected by including and consulting Indigenous communities at the beginning of national processes. This means that instead of being consulted by AURA Freedom during this Community Engagement Initiative for the National Action Plan to end Gender-Based Violence, they would have been at the table with the Federal government beforehand to carry out their own consultations. This is so Indigenous communities are not simply consulted for their tools or skills, but to emphasize perspective, worldview, and philosophies that are needed to drive the movement forward. Without this, all we see is a replication of oppressive systems and stagnation.
- Indigenous Healers noted that it took two years after the 2019 MMIWG2S Inquiry Final Report to release a National Action Plan to Address Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit Peoples (which was one of the recommendations of the Final Report), and more women were killed and/or went missing during those two years. Two years after the 2019 MMIWG2S Inquiry Final Report, there is still no separate National Action Plan to Address Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit Peoples, as was recommended in that report.
- Indigenous Healers noted that Indigenous Worldview and Perspectives must be included in every level of this movement but must be driven by community - community and frontline staff who are doing the work must be recognized and must be driving the solutions to these complex, nuanced, and systemic root causes of gender-based violence.

Grassroots Support

- ***“Let the Indigenous community lead their healing and futures. Give the communities the resources and space and self-efficacy to do so.”***
- Pamela Hart, Executive Director of Native Women’s Resource Centre of Toronto
- Participants highlighted the importance of uplifting The Grassroots’ voices to ensure genuine change and solidarity. They noted the need to be mindful of how the system replicates abuse and violence by dictating access and system change to suit the comfort of those in power.
- Participants noted that the narrative is not in the hands of the government to control, but The Grassroots - the government must defer resources, support, and finances to those at the frontline doing the work.

Funding

- Participants noted that funding requirements create limitations and restrictions that do not match the community effort.
 - In particular, funding reporting requirements are intrusive of Indigenous sacred ceremonies, cultural healing tools, and restorative justice philosophies.
- Indigenous Healers stated they do not feel comfortable sharing sacred practices as history and modernity dictates that disrespect of these practices will ensue.
 - All of the Healers we heard from urged that cultural information and practices cannot become regulated or put under scrutiny as this is a form of colonial abuse.
- Participants stated that there needs to be more funding for the cost of market rent or more Indigenous-based housing that offers cultural and land-based healing as there are difficulties in accessing housing due to systemic racism.

Solidarity Movements & Partnerships

- Participants highlighted the need for fostering partnerships with other organizations and/or communities.
- Participants stated that we must work together as a collective in solidarity to push the movement forward to end gender-based violence .
- Participants stated that we must empower women, girls, and Two Spirit peoples from a holistic perspective and refer them to Indigenous teachings and land-based healing services.



**“We are not asking for permission anymore,
I think that’s the greater message.”**

MaryAnn Shoefly, Healer at Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto





02 Prevention of Gender-Based Violence

A NOTE FROM AURA FREEDOM ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Gender-based violence is a very old story of who is valued more, and who is valued less.

It thrives in conditions of inequity.

The antidote...is education.

Education is key. Education, quite simply, is the one true way to end gender-based violence. Why would we ever want to just treat the effects of violence when we can prevent it from happening in the first place?

Our research has also told us that The grassroots women's sector knows what it needs to flourish. No matter where we went and who we interviewed during the creation of the first Relentless Resilience report and during the community consultations that informed this report. **The Grassroots** told us that what was needed was not more funding to respond to gender-based violence, but advocacy and education to *prevent* it.

Yes, prevention might seem to cost more up front. It is easier for funders to say, "We provided shelter for 30 women fleeing violence." It is much more complex (and expensive) to dismantle oppressive structures and systems to prevent the violence from happening at all.

But the cost of education and prevention will pay for itself ten-fold. With robust prevention efforts, domestic violence shelters, food banks, legal aid, welfare aid, and more will be made redundant. With proper education, adults will pass their knowledge on to their children, and their children pass it on to their children. Cycles of trauma and violence will be stopped in their tracks and millions of Canadians will finally be able to live free of violence.

There is no quick fix to gender-based violence.

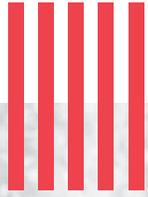
True prevention that addresses the root causes of gender-based violence will take long-term, robust investments, and proactive planning. It will take courage, resilience, and patience. And although governments might not be able to 'see' the changes happening in real-time, it is the only way to truly end the violence for good.

We have to be in this for the long haul.

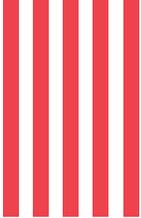
The ripple effects of education will be seen for generations to come, and that is how we create systemic, long-lasting change. Aura Freedom is an organization that focuses on upstream prevention initiatives to end gender-based violence that will ultimately create societal changes that span generations. We are long-time advocates of prevention efforts that focus on dismantling root causes through an equity-advancing and intersectional feminist lens.

During these consultations, many of our partners relayed similar visions for gender-based violence prevention. If implemented properly and adequately, the prevention efforts outlined below will not only work to eradicate gender-based violence, **they will change the world.**

The time is now.



Gender-based violence is a very old story of who is valued more, and who is valued less.



02

Prevention of Gender-Based Violence

WHAT THE GRASSROOTS SAID

When it comes to preventing gender-based violence, our contributors stated that children and youth need to be educated on gender-based violence, as well as its root causes (gender inequality, intersectional feminism, unhealthy gender norms, systemic racism, colonization, trans and homophobia, access to power and resources, self esteem, isolation, etc.) so as to advance equity. Participants stressed that intersectional education must also be extended to adults – both perpetrators and victims/survivors – so as to reach all Canadians outside of school settings. There is a consensus that gender-based violence education must start with children and youth, as well as boys and men, through partnerships to eliminate gender-based violence, dismantle toxic masculinity and promote healthy masculinity. Many participants stated that we need to streamline the government’s data on gender-based violence and how information is dispersed to relevant stakeholders to create gender-based violence education that is easily accessible for all Canadians.

The prevention education outlined below must be viewed as important as Math, Reading, and Science in order to foster a more equitable and peaceful society free of violence. This education cannot be offered as an after-school program or annual assembly. It must be carefully embedded into all parts of Canadian school curricula, from pre-school to post-secondary school. As Canada works to address the root causes of gender-based violence, we will begin to see benefits in all other areas of Canadian society.

Formal Education to Prevent Gender-Based Violence - Schools

Formal Education Frequency

- Participants stated that we must provide a multiplicity of avenues where gender-based violence education is understood as a complex issue.
- Participants highlighted the need for the federal government to urge/recommend/encourage provincial governments to mandate gender-based violence education and prevention curricula. Our participants have stated that without provincial mandates, gender-based violence education in schools will not change.
- Participants stated that schools need to incorporate education on gender-based violence and gender inequality through every aspect of teaching and in every subject.
- Participants highlighted the importance of everyone in Canada having access to gender-based violence education whether through public education, school or rehabilitative programs.
- Participants stated that we must provide age-appropriate education (from pre-school to post-secondary) that works to advance equity (gender, race, class, etc.) as well as education on consent, healthy relationships and includes respect and bodily autonomy as well as all areas of disempowerment.
 - This education must be embedded in every aspect of school curricula (including the types of materials/books used/films shown) and created in partnership with the gender-based violence /women’s sector and all organizations must be funded appropriately to carry out this work, especially since the women’s sector is already stretched for funding.



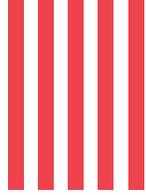
- Participants highlighted that information must incorporate child-friendly ways of learning and include Indigenous teachings (ie. relation between sharing and Indigenous history).
- Many innovative ideas were brought forward during our consultations. For example, one participant highlighted that secondary schools can create opportunities for students to earn their 40 hours of volunteer work by incorporating age-appropriate gender-based violence prevention work into their accepted activities. Another suggestion was to use fun spaces like festivals to convey information and provide opportunities to discuss gender-based violence.
- Participants stated that schools need to utilize what they have to address gender-based violence and the need for safe spaces to foster conversations through books and art.
- *“The Ontario Kindergarten framework has four frames, two of which are Belonging/Contributing and Self-Regulation/Well-Being. These concepts need to be a bridge to home life especially early on.”* - Luise Hoffman, principal at Clinton Public School in Avon Maitland District School Board.
- Participants noted that it is important to work with young boys from an early age to foster healthy masculinity, bring awareness to gender-based violence prevention, and challenge attitudes that enable gender-based violence through an intersectional lens.
 - Participants highlighted that a lot of onus is on women and girls to protect themselves, versus men and boys to act differently (rape culture).
- Participants stated that education needs to address microaggressions and various ways violence may appear, including many small acts of violence that build up to disempower as well as race/sexuality microaggressions that make one vulnerable to gender-based violence.
- Participants stated that Indigenous education must be included from the beginning of the Indigenous-settler relationship to create a complete understanding of present-day relationships and Indigenous rights.
- Participants stated that early intervention is key and must include colonization, decolonization, truth and reconciliation.
 - As many of our participants noted, colonialism and racism are embedded in the education system, and this needs to be dismantled for true change to happen. One participant pointed to the Ontario’s Ministry of Education Investigator Report on the Peel District School Boards that outlines systemic racism children haven’t experienced in the school system and implementation of recommendations.

Formal Education Content

- Participants stated that gender equity and gender equality must be centered in every educational resource developed – from understanding concepts to practice.
- Participants stated that education must address gender-based violence and how it intersects with disempowerment.
 - Participants noted that it is important to understand that violence may be committed in reaction to a lack of resources, respect, capacity, etc.
- Participants stated that education must reflect how surroundings influence and reinforce concepts of gender using games, TV shows, books, etc.
- Participants stated that root causes of gender-based violence must be addressed and education to advance equity must be implemented from pre-school to post-secondary – some root causes include: gender inequality, sexism, patriarchy, colonialism, anti-Black racism, systemic racism, capitalism, trans and homophobia, etc. [For more recommendations on education, please refer to pages 78 and 79 of the original Relentless Resilience report.](#)
- Participants stated the importance of education embedded in formal school curricula on healthy relationships and consent at every age (with age appropriate language/subject matter) from pre-school to post-secondary. This information should be created in partnership with the gender-based violence sector and groups funded appropriately to do so.

Public Education to Prevent Gender-Based Violence - National Campaigns

- ***“Our vision is for a just, equitable, and safe Canada where the government’s violence prevention efforts take into account the disproportionate impact of Gender-based violence on racialized, low-income communities. Some key actions include [but are not limited to] employment equity and income security, affordable and accessible housing, increased funding for legal aid, language-specific and culturally-sensitive services, and education and awareness (starting from the high school level) on legal rights, and healthy relationships.”*** – Silmy Abdullah, Staff lawyer, South Asian Law Clinic of Ontario (SALCO).



02

Prevention of Gender-Based Violence

Public Education Method

- Participants highlighted the need to speak to people on an individual level to show how gender-based violence affects them specifically in relation to their unique, intersectional position.
- Campaigns must be constant, consistent and frequent - not “one-off” campaigns once a year on International Women’s Day. The information presented in the campaigns must be created in partnership with the gender-based violence sector and diverse grassroots groups working to end gender-based violence /with survivors.
- Participants highlighted the need to illustrate what gender-based violence looks like in Canada and how neglecting to address seemingly ‘harmless’ issues of gender-based violence (that only affect women or are ‘private family matters’) leads to larger and more complex ones. Public awareness campaigns on the effects of gender-based violence (including fiscal effects) on the greater Canadian population is important as people will be more willing to be a part of the change if they know the problem affects them as well. Aura Freedom has demonstrated this with their #EndGender-basedviolence toAchieveSDGs infographic - a snapshot of gender-based violence in Canada and how it affects every single aspect of Canadian life and the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- Participants highlighted the need for national campaigns to be focused on solidarity and use social pressure to bring communities together to address gender-based violence .
 - Messages on the effects, types, resources and signs of gender-based violence should be integrated into everyday life, in places people frequent, such as liquor stores, grocery stores, schools, religious institutions, academia, etc.
- Participants highlighted that campaigns must have cross-cutting themes of gender-based violence to include Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C), femicide/filicide, religion, and culture.
- Participants stated that education and information can be shared through campaigns, TV ads and commercials, billboards, etc. to get proper gender-based violence language and terminology disseminated to the public.
- Participants stated that religious leaders, places of worship or other places people gather must be trained in gender-based violence and provide resources/education.
- ***“We must create a culture where it is less appealing to have power over people and more appealing to have power with people.”*** - Deb Singh, Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Women Against Rape
 - Participants reiterated the need to move into bigger concepts of sharing, respect, and caring and have information in an accessible format for all ages and groups of people.

Public Education Method

- Participants noted that the content of public gender-based violence education must be created in partnership with grassroots gender-based violence groups and organizations who are funded appropriately to do so.
- Participants highlighted the need for campaigns to include reintegration into society for survivors of gender-based violence .
- Participants highlighted the need to work from a public health perspective and educate on how gender-based violence affects the social determinants of health.
- Participants highlighted the need to focus on healthy masculinity and deconstructing power imbalances rooted in gender norms and roles.
 - Participants highlighted a couple of campaigns done with the Toronto Argonauts, The Maple Leafs, etc. and note that these campaigns should be amplified as harmful messages on masculinity are still part of mainstream culture.
- Participants highlighted the need for campaign and educational material that is reflective of diverse folks.
 - As noted in the consultations - gender-based violence campaigns must accurately reflect all races, ethnicities, and cultures so everyone can identify themselves in campaign content.
- Participants stated that campaigns must include statistics to show the true effects of gender-based violence - but this means research must be encouraged as there is a lack of information on gender-based violence in a Canadian context. This means that certain types of gender-based violence are not recognized, resulting in an incomplete picture of what gender-based violence truly looks like in Canada.

Culturally-informed

- Participants emphasized that newcomers must be educated on gender-based violence and receive this education from fellow community members who specialize in gender-based violence to ensure it is conducted in a culturally-informed manner.
- Participants stated that prevention messages must be tailored and nuanced to reach all communities.
 - An effective practice is to reach youth of different communities and connect them through peer-to-peer programs that focus on educating on upstream root causes with equity-building initiatives built in. The National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health defines upstream/downstream as: “Upstream interventions and strategies focus on improving fundamental social and economic structures in order to decrease barriers and improve supports that allow people to achieve their full health potential. Downstream interventions and strategies focus on providing equitable access to care and services to mitigate the negative impacts of disadvantage on health”
 - An example of this method, *Aura Freedom’s Human Trafficking Peer Prevention Project*, will be found in the *Relentless Resilience* report pages 34-35.
- Participants stated that education must be inclusive and educate young people on various cultural histories in ways that are

appropriate and utilize various viewpoints.

- Appropriate, culturally-sensitive support, protections, etc. should be developed with the affected communities themselves.

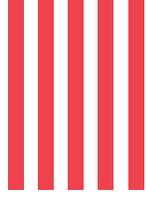
Media Standards on Gender-based violence

- Participants stated that there must be national standards when addressing gender-based violence in the media and these standards must be created in partnership with the gender-based violence sector. There must be ethics established in regards to reporting gender-based violence stories.
 - “The media must have standards when portraying marginalized groups because the media often encourages stereotypes and violence.” - Caroline Pugh-Roberts, Support Worker, Salvation Army
 - There are many examples from which to be inspired by, such as Britain’s Advertising Authority that banned harmful gender stereotypes in ads in June 2019.
 - Media stories on gender-based violence cannot be sensationalized. stories cannot be sensationalized.
 - Reporters, journalists, and news organizations must be trained on how to report on gender-based violence, what types of questions are acceptable, what topics retraumatize or create stigma. This must be done in order to support survivor rehabilitation and manage misconceptions surrounding gender-based violence.



“Responsible journalism could be a game-changer. Instead of using women’s stories of abuse to sell your newspapers, why not walk in solidarity with the gender-based violence sector and use your journalism for change? It’s not about who can publish the most violent or sensational story -it’s about ending the violence and respecting the survivor.” -

Marissa Kokkoros, Executive Director of
Aura Freedom International



02

Prevention of Gender-Based Violence

Addressing Access to Education to Prevent Gender-based violence

Government Responsibility - Access to Education

- Participants highlighted that schools are limited in their teaching to what is available in the curriculum – this limits a teacher’s ability to speak on difficult topics such as gender-based violence and bodily autonomy. The Federal Government must urge Provincial Governments to ensure gender-based violence education will be embedded within the curriculum for all ages, across all subjects.
- Participants stated that education must be supported beyond the formal school system to also provide space for community, non-profit organizations, and service providers to have discussions around such topics.

Nuanced Access to Education

- Participants stated that education must incorporate accessibility mechanisms in a variety of manners, from disability supports to recognizing the rights of undocumented people to readily available, funded and/or free education.
- Participants highlighted the need for prevention programming to be made easily available before an individual has committed gender-based violence and that is not only available through the courts.
 - People who recognize the access to services before their violence escalates. Some noted that this education must be provided on an individual level using common language and definitions.
- *“When we’re talking about education [we must examine it from a perspective of] how do we make it accessible to those without status who are coming from different countries around the world beyond the high school level? Because a lot of the youth that we work with are passionate, have interest, want to pursue education, but they face systemic barriers that are put in place by the government that don’t allow them to pursue this education.” - Natalie Gardiner, Anti-Trafficking Youth Worker from FCJ Refugee Centre*
 - Many of the women and young girls that access services at FCJ Refugee Centre have experienced gender-based violence in their country of origin and in Canada. They face barriers in accessing support, often due to their immigration status and limitations with regards to filing a refugee claim.
 - Youth often do not meet the age limits for certain programs or fall in between the age range for others – specialized and accessible programs and support services must be made available to all regardless of their immigration status or age.
 - *For more information on issues faced by immigrant, refugee, and non-status women and girls please look to Aura Freedom’s Relentless Resilience report on pages 52-57.*

- Participants stated there must be prenatal education for parents or people who are expecting a child to ensure gender-based violence prevention is incorporated all throughout life. This can be done from a public health perspective with gender-based violence education and resources provided in a way similar to the education provided to mothers and new parents on breastfeeding, changing diapers, CPR, etc. (courses, pamphlets, online courses, etc.).

- Participants stated that the above mentioned gender-based violence education for parents must include topics such as healthy parent and child relationships, youth empowerment, and gender norms in culturally- sensitive manners.

Language Access to Education

- Participants stated that gender-based violence prevention education must be inclusive of different languages . Many people in Canada experience barriers to education as it is not accessible in their own language.
- Participants highlighted the need for English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to be provided for all, with or without citizenship.

Dismantling Stigma - Access to Education

- Participants stated that the stigma surrounding discussions of gender-based violence is a massive barrier towards education.

- One method of addressing stigma as mentioned by some participants is through public health campaigns that aim to destigmatize experiences of violence and call-in perpetrators of violence, as opposed to “calling them out”.

“For a person of colour, it is sometimes unsafe to call out a person on the injustice and harm they have done and it can also be exhausting calling in folks that have done injustice and harm. So I call on allies to call out injustice when it is unsafe for a person of colour to do so. As well for allies to call in folks of injustice and harm in unpacking their biases and how much harm they are creating.” - Asha Dahir, Community Engagement Manager and Project Coordinator, Aura Freedom International

Funding for Education to Prevent Gender-Based Violence

- Participants stated that the government must fund more public and formal education programs and campaigns to prevent gender-based violence - not just respond to it..
- Participants stated that these initiatives must aim to bridge the divide between academia, public education, and Indigenous knowledge.

Restrictive Funding Contracts

- Participants noted that the language within contracts for the Ministry of Attorney General for sexual assault centres needs to be expanded as it currently may limit services to only women, neglecting gender diverse people, men, and boys who also experience sexual assault.
 - This creates fear and prevents sexual assault centres from providing services to marginalized communities, such as trans, genderqueer, Two Spirit, and intersex people, who have experienced sexualized violence.
 - An example was given of the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC) in addressing this concern by actively working to create safer and accountable spaces for trans, genderqueer, Two Spirit, and intersex people.

Education to Prevent Gender-Based Violence for Government Officials, Stakeholders, Employees, etc.

Education Framework

- Participants stated that government frameworks must be changed to clearly outline mandatory gender-based violence and anti-oppression training, information, and education for policy makers, educators, police, healthcare providers, judges, Crown attorneys, immigration stakeholders, etc.
- Participants highlighted that national standards for gender-based violence prevention education must be made into policies/man-dates that everyone must follow.
 - Some participants stated that there must be funding to ensure professionals are trained to identify various types of gender-based violence (FGM/C, human trafficking, IPV, coercive control, etc.)

- Participants highlighted that from every level of government – from individual government employees to government websites – language must be incorporated that is appropriate and communicates the desired messages (to accomplish this, governments must work with the gGender-based violence sector). By making gender-based violence language common-place, knowledge will become integrated into everyday life.
- A common example that was provided during the consultations was during the push to eliminate smoking, anti-smoking rhetoric was infused into every aspect of Canadian life until everyone knew just how bad smoking was. The same could be said about drinking and driving and wearing seat-belts. In the 80s and 90s, messages were disseminated over and over again until everyone knew how bad smoking was, and how unsafe drinking and driving or not wearing a seat-belt was. This is how we must address gender-based violence awareness and education. Gender-based violence must be treated as an urgent public health issue.

Gender-Based Violence Training

- Participants stated that there must be a standard curriculum for professionals (police, doctors, government workers, etc) that is diverse and includes different experiences (FGM/C, Indigenous, LGBTQ2S+, etc).
- Participants highlighted that all levels of governments must acknowledge and educate on the multiple genders people identify with.
- Participants stated that government officials, police, health care workers, educators, and every other sector must be provided with educational training on gender-based violence and anti-oppression.

Human Trafficking Specific Training

- Participants stated that judges, courts, and other stakeholders must have anti-human trafficking training that is trauma-specific.
- Participants stated that education must be conducted at the federal level with immigration officers as they are key in determining whether or not an individual is granted permanent residency status.
 - Many of our community partners that work with newcomer/ refugee/immigrant/non-status people highlight instances where immigration officers failed to understand the complexity of human trafficking cases. *For more information on issues faced by human trafficking survivors and immigrant, refugee, and non-status women and girls please look to Aura Freedom’s Relentless Resilience report on pages 28-37 and 52-57 respectively.*
- Participants stated that intersectionality must be applied in all cases specifically to the intersection of human trafficking and survivor criminalization. The onus and burden of proof must not fall unto the survivor of violence.
- Butterfly - Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Network - states that it is important to educate people on the difference between sex work and human trafficking – in addition to the harm of criminalization and some anti-trafficking initiatives and policies.

03

Frontline Response for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence



WHAT THE GRASSROOTS SAID

Our contributors noted that without meeting basic needs for all, we cannot prevent gender-based violence. The social safety net must be expanded to include all those living in Canada. For example, survivors of domestic violence need to know that if they are experiencing violence, there are resources at their disposal to leave their partner and still have a home and the ability to care for their health and children, regardless of socioeconomic status. Survivors need to focus on healing from trauma, not how they will maneuver life with an abuser or the inaccessible housing and childcare systems. All participants noted that holistic health services are preventative; if there is comprehensive access to health services, those at risk of violence have the necessary resources and professionals in their lives to recognize the warning signs and make changes.

All of our partners highlighted the need to think long term. We must provide the basic needs that result in a healthy and prosperous society. We must have federally mandated benefits that are extended to all Canadians.

Healthcare & Community Support

- Participants stated the need for free, accessible comprehensive health care for all - prescriptions, dental, optical, mental health services, psychotherapy, etc. including culturally sensitive services.
 - Participants stated comprehensive health care must be provided to all regardless of immigration status and include survivors and their families.
- Participants stated the need for community and social groups that offer social support and provide opportunities for survivors to contribute to society and feel included.
 - Participants stated the need for support groups that are specific to the various types of Gender-based violence with counsellors trained on those specific topics.
- Participants stated the need to create meaningful opportunities for folks affected by gender-based violence and better ways to respectfully engage and communicate with each other.
- Many participants noted gender-based violence policies must include mandatory training for healthcare providers, doctors, nurses, midwives, psychologists, and other relevant stakeholders.
- Participants noted that survivors who live in Canada are forced to visit doctors that are unaware of FGM/C and are not culturally-competent, resulting in inadequate support and services that they desperately need.
- Butterfly Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Network highlighted the need for service providers to develop responses that include legal and non-legal strategies to support people experiencing abuse. They advocate for the realization of migrant sex workers' rights and encourage relevant stakeholders to engage in ongoing, reflective practices by learning from migrant sex workers.



- Butterfly noted the need to end repressive rescue approaches, policies, and bylaws in all levels of government that make sex work more dangerous. They also noted the danger of viewing all sex work as exploitation/human trafficking and how this assumption creates a dangerous environment for sex workers. *“Actual cases of exploitation in the workplace are not recognized, and workers are prevented from improving their conditions and accessing labour protections.”* – Butterfly Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network
- Participants stated the need for permanent paid sick days.
- *“The Ontario Government recently voted against paid sick days. In a regular year, this would be outrageous, but during a pandemic it is unthinkable. Can you imagine? No sick days during a pandemic. What a privilege it is to be able to deny paid sick days. What a privilege it is to be able to afford to get sick. What a privilege it is to deny the needs of those who voted you into office. But they ignore the fact that providing paid sick days would cost less in the long run because illnesses would be mitigated when minor, instead of ignored until they result in major health issues, costing more to taxpayers. Did you know that women take the most sick days to care for themselves and their children? Neglecting to provide paid sick days is actively forcing women into poverty. This is systemic gender-based violence in action.”* - Olivia Allen, Development Coordinator, Aura Freedom International.

Economic Empowerment

- Participants stated the need for economic empowerment programs that provide survivors with the resources they need to flourish.
- Participants stated the need for financial support to be easily accessible in areas such as basic needs, higher education, housing, etc. for survivors
- Participants highlighted the need for employment opportunities through education/training must be guaranteed and accessible to all regardless of ODSP (or similar) status.
- Participants stated the need to reduce barriers to employment and prevent criminal background checks unless it is proven to be warranted for the job.
- Participants stated the need for subsidized or geared to income housing for all.

- It was mentioned that Bill C-273 must pass and Universal Basic Income must be instituted for all - beginning with those who were on Ontario's UBI Pilot Program that was prematurely cut leaving some recipients in a worse economic position than before.

- *“Neglecting to provide comprehensive services perpetuates gender-based violence because without it, survivors cannot heal. And neglecting to provide comprehensive health services costs more money to taxpayers because retroactive care is more expensive than preventative care. Most communities want to create a productive workforce that creates wealth but when individuals do not receive adequate health care, treatment, housing, etc. they cannot contribute to society, costing the government and taxpayer money. And during the pandemic, it was obvious the socioeconomic gap had increased drastically. Why are the ultra rich not being taxed more? If the ultra rich were taxed properly, we could support a comprehensive healthcare system. But the rich get richer off the poor and rarely pay their dues. And what group is the most impoverished? Women. Taxing the ultra rich would help end gender-based violence because gender-based violence survivors would have free access to holistic care. Without it, survivors of gender-based violence will be unable to heal and will remain in the cycle of poverty due to high costs. We must create a more fair and economically prosperous Canada. We must spend money to support healthy Canadians who will in turn create an influx of money into the economy.”* - Olivia Allen, Development Coordinator, Aura Freedom International.

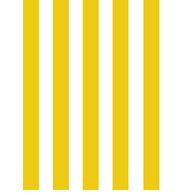
- [To learn more about how gender-based violence is tied to development, please look to Aura Freedom's #EndGBVtoAcheiveSDGs.](#)

Housing

- See Social Infrastructure and Access section..

Food Security

- See Social Infrastructure and Access section.



03

Frontline Response for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence

Holistic, Wrap-Around Services

Coordination of Holistic, Wrap-Around Services

- Participants stated the need to have centralized, wrap-around services for survivors. Survivors are often retraumatized retelling their stories every time they need to access different services. Survivors need one worker who encompasses all their needs and treats the whole person, not just fragments.
- Participants stated the need for coordination between organizations to ensure holistic health and support for survivors.
- Participants stated the need to highlight the power of networks and coalitions to encourage collaborations between organizations and the need for sustainable funding to continue the work of these networks.
 - An example provided was the Toronto Counter Human Trafficking Network, a collaboration of many organizations that work with survivors and victims of human trafficking to provide truly holistic support.
 - Some participants highlighted this could be mimicked for those with lived experience of other forms of gender-based violence as it usually takes more than one organization to provide support.
- It was suggested by some participants the need for a number/hotline where survivors get all the support and services that are required, otherwise the various services and entities a survivor needs to contact can be overwhelming.

Providing Holistic, Wrap-Around Services

- Participants highlighted the need to “meet people where they are” and make services easily accessible from The Grassroots to all levels of governments.
- Participants highlighted the need for increased access to health and survivor services that encompass the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional self, while fulfilling the basic needs (food, clothing, etc).
- Participants stated the need for interval housing with trained workers on site that is physically accessible to all (for example, an accessible elevator).
 - Participants highlighted that service providers for interval housing sites – from the receptionist to the counsellor – must be trauma informed.
- Participants highlighted the importance of gender-based violence sector peer support and mentorship programs as they are vital and play an integral role in healing and recovery.
- Participants stated the need for service providers in the gender-based violence sector to have support in place to prevent burnout, including paid sick days, health benefits, and mental health support. Some participants stated that we must empower our helpers and healers to continue their work in healthy and sustainable ways.
- Participants highlighted the need for specific programming (specific to gender-based violence type, culture/ethnic group, etc.) for survivors of various communities and the need to provide for their basic needs and counselling services.
- Participants highlighted the need for free, emergency, trauma- and violence-informed childcare for women going through the court system.

Access to Holistic, Wrap-Around Services

- Participants stated that access to services must be provided in many ways – in-person, phone, email, text, etc .
 - This must be centralized and in as many languages as possible to create access for all survivors.
- Participants highlighted the need to create systemic pathways for trans and non-binary community members to access services.

Support Survivors Working With Survivors

· The Dandelion Initiative wanted to highlight that survivors who are working with other survivors often require nuanced support for various trauma- specifically, nurses and emergencyroom nurses were highlighted- and suggested that health services must focus on vicarious trauma and trauma as an occupational hazard.

- **“Nursing is a feminized sector that’s completely underpaid, undervalued, underutilized, and under supported - nurses are suffering from the most exponential amount of mental health crises and violence that they ever faced before. We are losing community members because holistic care is not a part of their education or workplace standards of safety.”** - Viktoria Belle, Executive Director, The Dandelion Initiative.

- Participants highlighted that the experiences of nurses who are survivors of violence can be applied to other frontline service.

- [Aura Freedom’s Relentless Resilience report](#) discusses how

women’s organizations are underfunded, understaffed, underappreciated, and burning out - and this has only worsened during the COVID-19 crisis.

- *“In Canada, women’s organizations, domestic violence shelters, and sexual assault centres are hanging by a thread at the best of times. COVID-19 only made things worse. Chronically underfunded, understaffed, overworked and overlooked, grassroots organizations addressing gender-based violence rarely receive what they need, even though they are doing some of the most important work in the world. Throughout COVID, we have seen the recognition of frontline workers, yet those who are supporting women fleeing violence are hardly mentioned. In Toronto in Dundas Square right now, there is a wonderful sign posted from the City of Toronto that thanks frontline workers, grocery store staff, food delivery employees, and more. gender-based violence sector workers are not there, even though we have also been on the frontlines supporting the influx of women fleeing violence and many of us have never closed our doors throughout the pandemic.”*

- Marissa Kokkoros, Aura Freedom

- Many participants mentioned more time, funding, and staff would be some key steps in alleviating the issues of burnout.



04 Law & Justice



WHAT THE GRASSROOTS SAID

Many of our partners noted that real change in the fight against gender-based violence must also include the legal and justice systems with stakeholders and officials understanding the root causes, implications, effects, impacts, etc. of gender-based violence. Judges, police, CAS workers, and other stakeholders that hold power can attempt to advance equity through in-depth training and education.

Some of our partners highlighted the need to work towards a rehabilitative system opposed to a punitive system. They highlighted that we must change the system to provide support and intervention to perpetrators of violence because without it, there will be no change. People must know better, so they can do better.

Gender-Based Violence Policies to Promote Responsive Legal and Justice Systems

- Participants highlighted the need for policies around instances of gender-based violence to focus on individual history and context instead of the current incident at hand.
- Participants highlighted the need for judges and police need to be trained on how to identify gender-based violence and various types.
 - For example, judges and police need to know how to deal with coercive control, physical abuse, and the nuances of human trafficking cases.
- Participants highlighted the need to tie responsibility and accountability to gender-based violence training for stakeholders such as police and judges to ensure proper implementation of the training received.
 - Some community members noted that if accountability is not tied to training, stakeholders may still act on their own biases and perpetuate oppressive systemic violence.
- Participants highlighted the need for survivors, who commit crimes in order to survive, must be pardoned as criminal records make it very difficult to reintegrate into society.
 - A specific example highlighted was the need for charges related to sex work to be expunged.
- Butterfly Migrant Sex Workers Project highlighted that all levels of government must work together to recognize sex work and labour rights and support those experiencing violence in an equitable manner and called for the full decriminalization of sex work. Other participants did not call for full decriminalization of sex work. It is imperative that the government listen to all voices and all those affected by laws and policies in order to create solutions that will keep all women, girls and gender diverse people safe. The way to support all women and all survivor experiences is to give space to differing arguments so that we can broaden our understanding of sex work, sexual exploitation and human trafficking and support all those affected by gender-based violence.

Legal Aid

- Participants noted that financial restrictions in legal aid must be addressed and barriers lifted for access to legal aid support.
 - A specific example highlighted was that legal aid should not be restricted based on mental health or age.
- Participants stated the need for legal aid support to be provided to all survivors of violence



for free.

Children's Aid Society (CAS)

- Participants highlighted the role of CAS to provide proper support for children and families stating that their focus needs to be on intervention and solution as opposed to apprehension.
- Participants stated that CAS workers need culturally-sensitive gender-based violence training to properly address violence in their work.
- Bridget Perrier, from SexTrade101 under Indige-Spheres, highlighted that case loads for CAS workers must be lowered as heavy caseloads often result in staff burnout, leading to a lower quality of care for youth.
- Safia Hirsi, the Women's Program Coordinator from Central Neighbourhood House (CNH), highlighted a woman's story that showcased CAS best practices.
 - A woman with three kids who needed to leave her husband and was heavily involved in family court received holistic support through CNH. Community members rallied around her and CAS clearly stated they were there to protect and support her while she was dealing with a partner who was abusive.
 - This instance of holistic care and appropriate response from CAS greatly assisted this woman in healing as she dealt with domestic abuse.

Family Court

- Participants noted that family court processes are long, difficult, and place women and children at risk of violence as there is a lack of support for mothers experiencing violence.
- Participants sadly noted that Family Law Courts have consistently failed in identifying serious cases of domestic violence which have resulted in Femicide/Filicide.
 - Riya Rajkumar and Keira Kagan are two girls who lost their lives at the hands of their fathers due to the criminal justice system's failure to recognize and respond to domestic violence and coercive control. Sadly, there are many other examples like Riya and Keira and there will be more if femicide and filicide are not officially recognized and addressed in Canadian law, with specific attention paid to Filicide used as a way to retaliate against the mother - yet another form of violence against women.
 - Please see Femicide and Filicide located in Research and Data Collection section below for more information.

- Participants highlighted the need to urgently review family court procedures in identifying and responding to cases of domestic and family violence. Relevant stakeholders must be trained to recognize signs of violence.
- As mentioned in the PREVENTION pillar, with proper trauma-informed gender-based violence education, these instances of domestic violence in Family Court can be addressed appropriately before cases escalate to Femicide/Filicide.
- *"They discuss a woman currently staying at the shelter whose child does not want to visit their father because he is violent. But if she doesn't send him, she'll be held in contempt of court. Who is protecting this mother and child? Because the system sure as hell isn't. Then, we see the Amber Alerts."* - An excerpt from Relentless Resilience report - Author Marissa Kokkoros interviews women's shelter staff from Women's Habitat

Alternative Justice Models

- Participants highlighted the importance of transformative and restorative justice practices, noting that they are sacred and should only belong in the hands of the communities that created them - funding should be provided for these alternative justice practices with no restrictions and limited reporting requirements.
- As community members have noted, these are traditional and sacred practices that should not be exploited for public, corporate, or governmental use.



05 Social Infrastructure & Access



WHAT THE GRASSROOTS SAID

Many of our partners noted that The Grassroots often has a front row seat to the troubles and struggles of those experiencing gender-based violence. They have noted that there are issues of finance, housing, language, sexism, racism, stigma, accessibility, food security, and child care, just to name a few. Housing is overpriced, people cannot find affordable places to live. If people can find something they can pay for, it makes them choose between rent or other necessities. Health services for rural communities are as physically inaccessible as the waiting lists are long.

Women's organisations are chronically underfunded, leaving grassroots organizations fighting for funding while their employees live on the poverty line. Grassroots organizations must be supported and funded to do the work that is required and ensure our employees are not struggling more than those they support.

Gender-Based Violence Programming Requirements

- Participants noted that gender-based violence programming and services must exist with more access, with increased and sustained funding.
- Participants noted programming must be culturally relevant, anti-oppressive, trauma-informed, inclusive, and survivor-led/consulted.
- Participants noted that programming must be evidence-led and supported by community-based researchers.
- Participants noted resources developed through gender-based violence programming must be device-friendly and easy to access, online or in print, and in public and private spaces.
- Participants highlighted that gender-based violence programs must be aware of accusatory rhetoric as people do not want to identify themselves as abusers and this will discourage access.
 - Some participants highlighted the need to understand that many people who are now abusers were once the abused; the simple abuser-victim dichotomy does not hold true. In the same light, not all those who were abused go on to become abusers themselves. Proper gender-based violence education is needed.
- Participants noted that programming needs to be simple and introductory to invite people in with incentives in publicly funded spaces people already enjoy.
- Participants highlighted the need for federal gender-based violence policies that translate into provincial and municipal workplace safety standards.
- Participants noted gender-based violence policies must include mandatory training for healthcare providers, doctors, nurses, midwives, psychologists, and other relevant stakeholders.
 - Participants noted that more opportunities must be made available for foreign doctors to be able to practice in Canada as they may be able to provide culturally-sensitive care for their own communities.

Addressing Access

- Participants cited finances as a barrier to education, support, basic needs, proper housing, etc. and highlighted the importance of creating more pathways for economic empowerment.
- Participants highlighted the need for language accessibility – services and resources must be in as many languages as possible to ensure everyone has access.
- Participants noted that mental health services need to be made more accessible in rural communities as currently accessing rural services require traveling large distances.
- Participants noted that barriers need to be reduced for doctors from outside Canada to allow them to work as there is a lack of culturally-sensitive and diverse services for survivors of specific forms of violence, such as FGM/C.
- As previously mentioned, some participants noted that survivors who live in Canada are forced to visit doctors that are unaware FGM/C and are not culturally-competent, resulting in inadequate support and services that they desperately need.

Funding

- Participants noted that The Grassroots must be funded and empowered to do the work because they are trusted and known in the community. The Grassroots can easily reach those in need of support through their already established rapport and can mobilize in ways that do not incite more violence.
 - If community and grassroots organizations are sustainably funded, they can do the work in ways that are timely, realistic, and achievable.
- Participants noted the need for pockets of money to be readily available to a wide variety of groups, including smaller organizations. Small pockets of funding, routed straight to communities, will support the people doing the work within their own community. The ECSF that was routed to communities through the Community Foundations of Canada in 2020 was a great way to get funding to smaller, more grassroots organizations in an efficient and relatively painless way. This is the type of funding that is needed.

- Our partners noted that the community already has experts with lived experience and that current funding requirements restrict access for groups without charitable status.
- Participants stated that funding must be easily accessible, less strenuous, and without restrictions.
 - Funding must move away from exhausting grant applications, reporting processes, and restrictive budgets to enable community groups to do the work they need to do. Many small, grassroots organizations just don't have the staff required to write grants and report back. The result is that money often flows to larger organizations who can complete the work required and smaller grassroots groups are left with unsustainable funding or, worse, are forced to close their doors. This is not equitable.
- The exhausting requirements listed above mean community organizations are spending more time reporting than actually doing the work. This is counterintuitive and wastes the already limited resources. Grantors must also have reasonable time lines. All partners highlighted the need for funding to be made easily available to equip communities and survivors with training, formal education, business start-up funding, etc. to support their independence.
- An example mentioned is that women living with HIV experience restrictions if they are on ODSP with regards to work and training. Barriers to job training must be dismantled - survivors must be able to access training to improve their skills, which will in turn improve their economic position and quality of life.
- Partners noted the need for Gender-based violence programs to receive long-term funding for cohesive education.
- Partners noted that sustainable funding needs to go to established programming; pilot projects are not sustainable and will result in failure.
- Partners noted the need for increased funding for life-saving services such as housing, food security, employment services and training, and legal aid. This is a non-exhaustive list.



Housing

- Participants highlighted the need to ensure access to permanent, affordable, easily accessible housing.
 - There was a suggestion of housing for domestic violence and human trafficking survivors without any barriers, such as ID requirements or official reports of trafficking.
- Participants highlighted the need for housing to be subsidized, expanded, and scattered so people with similar difficulties are not clustered together, creating violent environments.
- Participants highlighted the need for trauma-specific transitional housing to be made easily available with support tailored to the specific type of gender-based violence – from human trafficking to FGM/C.
 - Participants noted the importance of keeping in mind that survivors of human trafficking may avoid transitional housing due to triggers from requirements and rules in transitional housing (reminiscent of abuse/violence/controlling situations).
- Participants highlighted the need for clinical services and trauma-informed doctors to be located at shelters to address issues of access.
- The Dandelion Initiative highlighted Beendigen’s housing model of including all necessary services and living space under one roof as an example of promising holistic and culturally-based care.

Youth Group Homes

- One participant called for the abolishment of group homes and for them to be replaced with models that produce a healthy, family-like environment.
 - Bridget Perrier, the co-founder of the SexTrade101 project under Indige-Sphere: *“Youth in care don’t need clinical atmospheres. They need to live in welcoming, family-like environments that act as a buffer to manipulations by exploiters and those who target vulnerable youth.”*

Food Security

- Participants highlighted the need to have food security for survivors of gender-based violence. Governments and other organizations must come together to find sustainable solutions to food insecurity and train all relevant stakeholders in gender-based violence prevention.
 - Participants noted that some barriers to accessing food banks have been reported, highlighting instances of racism, sexism, anti-Indigenous racism, etc. This results in women and gender diverse people avoiding food banks following experiences of discrimination and racism.

Universal Child Care

- Participants highlighted the need for Universal Child Care to be implemented immediately across the country.
- Participants highlighted the need for free, trauma- and violence-informed child care to be easily available for people who have experienced violence or are going through the criminal justice system.
- Participants stated the need for play-based and age-appropriate gender-based violence education must be included in childcare centres.

Human Trafficking

- Many participants noted that youth in foster care, crown wards, etc. are more vulnerable to human trafficking and this must be addressed.
 - Youth vulnerability to human trafficking is explored further in the Relentless Resilience report pages 28-37.
- Many participants noted there is a lack of trauma-specific and violence-informed safe houses and recovery centers.
 - ***“What about survivors of human trafficking who are navigating supports for mental health, addiction and rehab? What if you want to get treatment, but you’re not there yet? It’s either you get sober for 24 hours or 48 hours before you even enter the facility, or nothing. We need spaces where we could prep survivors before rehab so that they can feel supported and ready. I’ve seen a lot of girls and young women feel shunned or judged because they try to go to rehab and get kicked out because they’re just not ready. It’s not that simple. It’s all of the trauma, which is why you are using [substances] in the first place. So, you can’t just treat the addiction; you have to recognize the trauma connected to it. I think about that a lot. I don’t think we’re there yet. A lot of medical facilities still see addiction as solely a medical thing.”*** - Nikki Dube, Social Worker, Trauma and Crisis Counsellor, Human Trafficking Advocate, excerpt from Relentless Resilience, page 35.
 - Barriers to accessing this type of housing has been explored further in the Relentless Resilience report pages 28-37.



06 Research & Data Collection



WHAT THE GRASSROOTS SAID

In order to end gender-based violence, all of our partners agreed that we must see it as an urgent issue in Canada and around the world. Participants stated that we must see gender-based violence as an issue to understand more deeply, and like all issues we want to understand, we must invest in research to create data and statistics. Without this information, we cannot accurately depict what gender-based violence looks like in Canada or know when it has increased or decreased. We must support research into all types of gender-based violence including femicide, filicide, FGM/C, etc. that is disaggregated by race and ethnicity to accurately understand and respond to gender-based violence.

The Grassroots must be empowered and supported to end Gender-based violence, but this cannot be done without adequate research and the recognition of all types of gender-based violence. This research must be funded and delivered through communities with lived experience to support a holistic community-level approach to violence.

Research

- Participants noted that community-based research must be funded and encouraged as research is the foundation to policies.
 - Without Canadian research on gender-based violence, we will not be able to accurately portray gender-based violence in Canada. Currently there is no research on many different types of Gender-based violence. Without statistics gender-based violence sector workers cannot prepare appropriate responses to address Gender-based violence or create research-based arguments for gender-based violence prevention and education as required by funders.
- Participants noted that gender-based violence research must be subsidized and readily available.
- Participants stated that frontline workers need support in order to create reports; they have the stories and statistics but neither the time nor the funding to produce reports. They would like to see community-based researchers funded better to support frontline workers with the needed gender-based violence research.
- Participants noted that there must be race-based disaggregated data collection – both quantitative and qualitative.
- Participants noted the need for research and statistics on different types of gender-based violence in Canada.
 - Canada is currently one of only two countries in the western world without research or statistics on FGM/C.
 - With data and research, appropriate responses, services, and support can be developed.
- [Aura Freedom's Relentless Resilience report included an infographic](#) of how gender-based violence is hindering development and the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This was a difficult task as there is scarcity of data on gender-based violence in Canada, but the infographic still paints a clear picture: Canada will never flourish as long as gender-based violence continues to happen.



Painting by Pru Girme - Toronto Queer artist and photographer

Femicide and Filicide

- Aura Freedom calls for Femicide/Filicide to be officially recognized and defined in the Canadian Criminal Code and for the intersections between intimate partner violence, coercive control and Femicide/Filicide to be researched further.
 - Without official recognition and definition of Femicide, there will not be legitimacy to the claim of Femicide/Filicide or mandates to act against it. Recognizing Femicide as an extreme form of gender-based violence is the first step forward to addressing it.
 - Disconnecting misogyny from the killings of women is problematic and dangerous:

"The Montreal Massacre, the Toronto Van Attack, and the Nova Scotia Mass Shooting were not the result of the actions of 'madmen'. Oh, no. These massacres were calculated acts of misogyny deeply rooted in patriarchy and gender inequality. They specifically targeted and brutalized women because they were women and each of the killers had a history of violence against women and hatred toward them. We must recognize these murders as femicides and as hate crimes if we are to end them."

- Marissa Kokkoros, Executive Director of Aura Freedom

- "There is increasing international recognition that the killing of women and girls is perpetuated and maintained by the attitudes and/or actions, or lack of actions, not only by individuals, but also by organizations, institutions and governments." - Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability (CFOJA)
- Participants noted that Family Court judges, lawyers, and other stakeholders must be trained on issues of domestic violence, coercive control, and the sex- or gender-related motives and indicators as defined by CFOJA and Dawson and Carrigan (2020).

- Aura Freedom and Deborah Sinclair strongly call for the recognition of Femicide/Filicide and the killing of children in relation to intimate partner violence.
- "More than 90% of murder victims were female and more than 90% of the killers were male. When children were killed in this context, it was often in retaliation or punishment towards the mother. The worst and deepest way to hurt a mother is to harm her child. Most intimate murders of women and children are both predictable and preventable. In more than 70% of the cases we reviewed, there were a minimum of seven risk factors." - Deborah Sinclair, Independent expert and former member of the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee of the Chief Coroner's office of Ontario.

Human Trafficking

- Participants call for sustainable funding to be provided for a national anti-trafficking observatory that focuses on research, policy recommendations, and acts as a bridge between grassroots organizations, researchers, and the government.
 - "We need to reimagine our approach to anti-trafficking measures. There are a wide variety of models against trafficking to find inspiration from, such as the Serbian and Balkan models to the Toronto Counter Human Trafficking Network. We must also acknowledge the harm anti-trafficking measures have created in targeting sex workers and address these harms by involving all communities affected in an equitable manner, such as providing leadership roles and sustainable funding to ensure we are addressing exploitation and not stuck in fear due to run-away moral panics. We need to leverage the power of partnerships and create a national 'brave space' where all stakeholders are empowered to collaborate and move forward in tackling the root causes of violence and exploitation." - Talija Končar, Research and Policy Analyst, Aura Freedom International

Indigenous Worldview and Perspective

- Please see Section 1 on Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirit Peoples.



CONCLUSION

Gender-based violence is and has been a global emergency and human rights abuse for centuries, yet has never been treated as such.

Gender-based violence is fracturing families and communities. It is disrupting education. It is creating intergenerational trauma and addiction. It is limiting economic empowerment and perpetuating poverty. It is destroying the planet. And, sadly, it is robbing us all of infinite talent, opportunity, and love.

We want to be clear: none of the recommendations listed in this summary report are new.

Community organizations have been screaming for change for years.

Heads of state convene regularly to discuss struggling economies, migration, poverty, disease, and climate change, but we The Grassroots know that the eradication of gender-based violence and the empowerment of women and girls can bring increased wealth, health, peace and climate justice to our communities. We have known this for a long time. We have said it many times. And we are saying it again now.

When you break a woman down, you break down her family and entire community.

The only way forward is to go back to the beginning. To how we got here. To the root causes of violence and exploitation: patriarchy, gender inequality, systemic racism, colonialism, homo/transphobia, ableism, classism, and more. The only way forward is for all of us, in Canada and around the world, to invest in the way each child is treated, taught, protected and valued equally from day one.

Equity is everything.

And although governments might not be able to 'see' the changes happening in real-time, achieving equity is the only way to truly end the violence for good. The ripple effects will be seen for generations to come.

This will take long-term, robust investments, and proactive planning. It will take courage, resilience, and patience. It will take all levels of government putting humanity before politics and prioritizing working together to end Gender-based violence .

When will women and girls matter enough?

Our mothers, sisters and community members are dying.

In a world that has collectively mobilized to respond to COVID-19, from finding a vaccine to softening the blow to the economy, can we not mobilize in the same way for the millions of women and girls and gender-diverse folks who have experienced violence at pandemic rates for centuries?

Of course we can.

All that is needed is political will and sustainable funding that places trust in The Grassroots Gender-based violence sector.

Gender-based violence is a National Emergency.

It's time to declare the emergency. Then, we must act accordingly.

Sincerely,

The Aura Freedom team