



Legal Assistance of Windsor's summer law student Nicole Balthazar delivered the following speech at the Sisters in Spirit Vigil for Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2Spirit + (MMIWG2S+), held in Windsor on October 4, 2022:

*My research aimed to raise awareness of Gender-Based Violence amongst Indigenous communities across Turtle Island, specifically within Windsor/ Essex County. Discuss ways to combat this issue and maintain collective relations between Indigenous organizations within this community and the Legal Assistance of Windsor. To know there is a place to grieve and heal—a place to be seen and heard.*

*While the work is so essential, the stats were gruesome.*

*Indigenous women are 3.5 times more likely to experience spousal violence than non-Indigenous women. And although Indigenous women make up 1.2% of Ontario's population, of that 1.2%, 6% of female homicide victims are Indigenous—and that's not even the total number. Indigenous women and girls are more likely to be killed by a stranger than non-Indigenous women; almost 17% of those charged were strangers. 73% of trans 2Spirited individuals had experienced some form of violence due to transphobia, including 43% who reported experiencing physical and sexual violence. 20% of all trans 2Spirited people in Ontario had been physically or sexually assaulted for being trans, and another 34% had been verbally threatened or harassed. And 24% reported having been harassed by police for being a trans person.*

*What do these numbers mean? These numbers mean our justice system has failed the community. These numbers mean our government has failed the community. These numbers are a cry for help to individuals who remain wilfully blind to this injustice. The same individuals claim to have acted with a National Inquiry for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. These numbers clearly show the lack of assistance for all Indigenous individuals across Turtle Island. What's not being done is simple. The numbers are not creating a significant enough movement for officials to wake up and see that most of these cases and murders happen in their backyard—from their own "law enforcers." Instead of using the RCMP statistics, an investigation into the RCMP would be beneficial. There are not enough places for Indigenous women, girls, and trans 2Spirited individuals to go to when they are in danger or need legal assistance. Above all, there's not enough education about Indigenous gender-based violence.*

*Without education, how are people supposed to know they are in situations they shouldn't be? This summer, after speaking with so many individuals from the community—Aboriginal Legal Services, Metis Nation of Ontario, Can-Am, Caldwell First Nation, etc.—the need to create awareness and educate individuals in the community on their legal rights is a must to bridge the gap and truly start the healing process.*

*This violence is deeply rooted in colonial attitudes, perpetuating racism, and discrimination. And yet, colonialism is more than attitudes. It results in laws, regulations, and policies that have existed in different repetitions then, now, and in the future. Seven generations, to be exact.*

*So the question is: how do we fix the mess they created? We continue to heal the community by healing ourselves, taking as long as we need to heal. We are going through waves of grief and emotions. The road to healing isn't straight. Our paths aren't straight. Building trust with a justice system that has failed us isn't easy, but it's necessary. As supporters and allies, we can listen to those greatly affected by this pandemic. Hear their stories and offer a shoulder to cry on. But we cannot be complacent. We must stand up when we see Indigenous individuals mistreated by "law enforcers." Stand up when you see an Indigenous woman, girl or 2Spirited person in trouble. Do not turn a blind eye. And most of all, we must remember those that have passed on. Because together, we are more robust and louder. We need to continue to raise awareness and never stop telling our stories and remember that although your journey may be filled with scars, it's essential to remember that scars can heal and reveal how far you've come.*