THE SOGIE INITIATIVE

How to Host a Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR) Event

A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Children's Aid Societies and Indigenous Child & Family Well-Being Agencies

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SOGIE INITIATIVE

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies

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Statement from the Equity Service Analyst

I want to thank you for taking the time to read and go through this document as you consider planning a Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDoR) event at your organization. This step you are taking embodies the purpose of this day, to give respect, visibility and humanize a community whose struggle are so often in the shadows. The visibility the community often does receive, seeks to create fear, mock and dehumanize.

The Transgender, Gender Diverse, and Gender Nonconforming community has and always will be a part of the human story. As you read the names and learn the stories of those honoured during the ceremony, pause to reflect that their life had meaning, they were loved and loved others. The way they passed is not the defining moment of their life, nor their whole story. Each person on the list represents a loss for us all, and their passing is a failure of society and their environment. With each name read we commit to do better, individually and as a sector. You and those around you, can be the difference towards a world where TDoR becomes history and not the future.

My team and I dedicate this work to the beautiful folks who should still be with us today.

-Victor Santiago,
Equity Service Analyst
OACAS

1. Introduction

When Is TDOR?	Observed every year on November 20. (If a local community vigil is happening on November 20, hold your agency's event on a different workday so you don't compete.)
When to Host It:	Recommended during regular paid work hours—not as a casual 'Lunch and Learn.'
Who Is Invited?	All agency staff. Agencies are also encouraged to invite foster caregivers, volunteers, and local 2SLGBTQ+ community partners (or keep it staff-only, based on agency preference).
What Does It Cost?	Little to no cost ($0 for virtual events; optional cost of small candles and light refreshments for in-person gatherings).
Indigenous Well-Being Agencies:	This package offers a suggested layout for a standard TDOR ceremony. We recognize and respect that Indigenous Nations and agencies have distinct teachings and ceremonial practices.
What's Inside This Guide:	1. About TDOR & Child Welfare 2. Planning Basics 3. Ceremony Layout & Free Slides 4. Virtual vs. In-Person Steps 5. Ready-to-Use Scripts 6. Checklist 7. Glossary of Terms

What Is Transgender Day of Remembrance & Why Does It Matter to Us?

This ceremony is meant to ground the sector on the importance of supporting transgender, gender diverse and gender non-conforming children, youth and families. Some agencies have directly experienced the loss of someone from the community and this is an opportunity to mourn and remember them. For other agencies they may be fortunate enough to not have experienced that in the past.

However, when those who take part in the ceremony see just how many names are on the list annually, representing transgender lives lost to murder & suicide from Canada and around the world, it brings home the importance of the work. By acknowledging the impact of what happens when this community is not safe,

affirmed or seen, we as a sector can commit to ensuring we keep names off the list in future years to the best of our ability.

What Is Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR)?

Every year on November 20, people around the world gather to observe Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR). It is a solemn day to remember and honor transgender, Two-Spirit, non-binary, and gender-diverse people whose lives were lost to anti-transgender violence, hatred, and suicide.

The day was started in 1999 by transgender advocate Gwendolyn Ann Smith to honour Rita Hester, a Black transgender woman who was murdered in 1998. Today, TDOR is observed worldwide to mourn lives lost, raise awareness about anti-transgender discrimination, and commit to creating safer communities.

How TDOR Connects to Ontario Child Welfare & the SOGIE Initiative

In Ontario's child welfare sector, 2SLGBTQ+ children and youth—and especially transgender, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming young people—are overrepresented. Many of these young people come into contact with child welfare not because of who they are, but because they have experienced family rejection, conflict at home, bullying, or unsafe environments.

At the provincial level, the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE) Initiative at the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) supports agencies in creating safe, affirming spaces for 2SLGBTQ+ children, youth, families, and staff.

Hosting a Transgender Day of Remembrance event is recommended in the provincial SOGIE Pathways document, which gives agencies a clear roadmap for SOGIE best practices across Ontario.

> "I don't know who I am outside of someone who's just trying to be free and find safety for myself and for others."
>
> —Indya Moore, actor and model

How Our Sector's Work Saves Lives Across the Youth Continuum

As child welfare professionals, foster parents, caregivers, and volunteers, our daily actions have a direct impact on young people's lives. When we affirm a young person's gender identity—by using their chosen name and pronouns, advocating for safe homes, and connecting them to supportive care—we dramatically lower their risk of depression, self-harm, and suicide.

In Ontario's child welfare system, our support for young people extends through a full continuum into adulthood: from children and youth in care and Voluntary Youth Services Agreements (VYSA, ages 16–17), to the Ready, Set, Go! (RSG) transition program (up to age 23), and then to the provincial Aftercare Benefits Initiative (ABI). Through Aftercare Benefits, eligible former youth in care receive comprehensive health, dental, vision, and gender-affirming care coverage until age 25, followed by extended counselling and life-skills benefits from age 25 until age 29 (turning 30).

As a sector, by reading the names of those 25 and under who we may be actively supporting in their gender journey, we bring home the message that every person in that ceremony has a direct connection to the work and understands the direct impact they have on the lives of transgender, gender nonconforming and gender-diverse young people in their community.

A Note for Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Agencies

Honouring Nation-Specific Teachings & Ceremonial Practices

Please note that the ceremony layout and steps in this package are shared only as a suggestion for a standard Transgender Day of Remembrance event.

We understand and deeply respect that for Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Agencies—and across different Indigenous Nations—there are distinct teachings, sacred protocols, and Nation-specific practices when it comes to ceremonies of remembrance, speaking names or showing photos of those who have passed into the Spirit World, lighting candles or sacred fires, and honoring Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer relatives.

Indigenous Well-Being Agencies are encouraged to adapt or replace any part of this guide.



2. Planning Basics: When to Host & Who to Invite

1. Do Not Compete with Local Community Events on November 20

Local 2SLGBTQ+ organizations and trans-led community groups are at the heart of Transgender Day of Remembrance. When choosing a date for your agency's event, follow this golden rule:

- **Support Local Community Vigils First:** If a community partner or local 2SLGBTQ+ group is hosting a TDOR vigil on November 20 in your area, encourage your staff, caregivers, and volunteers to attend that community event on November 20.

- **Host Your Agency Event on a Different Day:** So that your agency does not compete with or pull attendance away from your community partner, hold your agency's TDOR event on a different workday (such as November 19 or November 21). If there is no community event in your region, your agency can host its event right on November 20.

- **Check the OACAS SOGIE Webpage for Ontario Events:** Every year, the OACAS SOGIE Initiative posts a list of Transgender Day of Remembrance events happening across Ontario on the OACAS SOGIE webpage (https://www.oacas.org/sogie/). Check this page and share the link with your staff so everyone knows where local ceremonies are happening.

2. Hold the Event During Work Hours — Not as a 'Lunch and Learn'

Transgender Day of Remembrance is a solemn memorial ceremony, not a casual training session. Best practice is to hold the observance during regular paid working hours—not as a 'Lunch and Learn.' Setting aside dedicated time during the workday

shows respect for the people being remembered and gives the ceremony the weight and care it deserves.

3. Make Everyone Feel Welcome & Give Plenty of Notice

- **Invite All Staff:** Send the invitation to all staff across every department and leadership level so everyone feels welcome to attend.

- **Consider Inviting Caregivers, Volunteers & Community Partners:** It is usually best practice to also invite foster parents, kin caregivers, volunteers, and local community partners (especially 2SLGBTQ+ organizations). However, each agency can decide whether to include external partners and caregivers or keep the ceremony as an internal staff gathering.

- **Give Proper Advance Notice:** Send out calendar invitations at least 3 to 4 weeks ahead of time so staff, caregivers, and partners can plan around appointments and attend.

3. How the Ceremony Works (At Little to No Cost)

You do not need a budget or paid outside speakers to host a meaningful Transgender Day of Remembrance event. Everything you need is available for free online.

The Free Resource: 'Remembering Our Dead' Website

The main resource used around the world for TDOR ceremonies is an organization and online memorial archive called Remembering Our Dead (https://tdor.translivesmatter.info). Every year, they publish:

1. **A Ready-to-Play PowerPoint Slideshow:** A free downloadable PowerPoint presentation containing memorial slides for every trans and gender-diverse

person lost around the world that year. You can play this slideshow in the background during your ceremony.

2. **Printable Memorial Pages with Photos:** A list of names, ages, countries, and printable one-page memorial sheets (which often include a photo of the person) that can be used by your readers.

Recommended Sector Format: Reading Names of Youth 25 & Under + Playing the Full Slideshow

Sadly, hundreds of transgender and gender-diverse lives are lost around the world each year, which means reading every name out loud can take several hours. For Ontario child welfare agencies, we recommend a practical, meaningful two-part approach:

What Happens	Why We Do It This Way
Part 1: Read Out Loud The Names of Youth Aged 25 & Under (Recommended Suggestion)	Volunteers or leaders take turns reading aloud the names of young people aged 25 and under from the Remembering Our Dead list. Connection to Child Welfare: Youth aged 25 and under represent the young people served across our child welfare programs—from children in care, VYSA (ages 16–17), and Ready, Set, Go! (RSG, up to age 23) through to comprehensive health, dental, and gender-affirming care coverage under provincial Aftercare Benefits (up to age 25, with extended counselling and life-skills benefits continuing up to age 29/30). Fits Work Hours: Keeps the spoken ceremony to a respectful 30 to 45 minutes. Your Agency's Choice: While reading youth 25 and under is our suggested practice, your agency can choose to read all names on the list if you prefer.
Part 2: Play on Screen The Full Remembering Our Dead PowerPoint Slideshow	While the names of youth 25 and under are read out loud, the full PowerPoint slideshow from Remembering Our Dead plays continuously in the background.

	Everyone Is Honoured: Playing the full presentation in the background ensures that every single trans and gender-diverse person lost around the world—of every age—is seen, honoured, and remembered.

4. Step-by-Step Guide: Running a Virtual or In-Person Event

You can host your ceremony virtually (on Teams or Zoom), in person, or as a hybrid event. Follow the simple steps below for your chosen format.

Option A: How to Run a Virtual Event

Step 1 — Prepare the Slides & Divide the Names: Before the event, download the PowerPoint slideshow from Remembering Our Dead (https://tdor.translivesmatter.info/pages/downloads). Filter the list of names for youth aged 25 and under (or use the full list) and divide the names among leaders or staff/caregiver volunteers who have offered to read.

Step 2 — Share the Slideshow & Soft Background Music: When the virtual meeting starts, share your screen so the Remembering Our Dead PowerPoint slideshow plays in the background. You can also play soft, somber instrumental or classical music quietly in the background.

Step 3 — Land Acknowledgement & Opening Remarks: Start with a Land Acknowledgement (or traditional opening), followed by a speaker who shares what Transgender Day of Remembrance is and why affirming trans and gender-diverse youth in child welfare saves lives. (A ready-to-read script is included in Section 5.)

Step 4 — Read the Names (Youth 25 & Under): Have your volunteer readers unmute one by one in their assigned order to read their section of names while the PowerPoint presentation continues playing on screen.

Step 5 — Leadership Closing & Thank-You: After a short moment of silence, have someone in leadership thank everyone for attending, remind staff of the importance of this work, and reaffirm why our sector takes time to remember this day.

Step 6 — Offer a Virtual Space to Debrief & Unpack: Let attendees know that designated support people are available in a virtual breakout room (or by phone/Teams chat) right after the ceremony for anyone who wants to talk, debrief, and unpack what they experienced.

Option B: How to Run an In-Person (or Hybrid) Event

Step 1 — Set Up the Room, Screen & Small Candles: Book a quiet, accessible room with a projector or large TV screen where the Remembering Our Dead PowerPoint slideshow can play in the background. Buy enough small candles (or battery-operated LED tea lights) so everyone who wants to light a candle can do so.

Step 2 — Print Individual Photo Pages for Readers (Recommended): On the Remembering Our Dead website (https://tdor.translivesmatter.info/reports), filter the list for youth aged 25 and under and print out each young person's individual page. These pages usually include photographs. Giving these printed photo pages to your readers puts a face to each name and brings added dignity to the ceremony.

Step 3 — Welcome & Candle Lighting: As the ceremony begins, invite attendees to light their candles while the PowerPoint slideshow (and optional soft classical or somber music) plays in the background.

Step 4 — Land Acknowledgement & Opening Remarks: Share a Land Acknowledgement (or cultural opening according to local Indigenous protocols), followed by the opening statement explaining TDOR and how affirming gender-diverse youth in child welfare has life-saving impacts.

Step 5 — Read the Names & Hold a Moment of Silence: Invite your readers to read the names of youth aged 25 and under from the printed pages while the full global slideshow plays on the screen behind them. (Your agency may also choose to read the full list of all ages.)

Step 6 — Leadership Closing & Light Refreshments: Have a leader thank everyone for being there and reaffirm why our sector honors this day. Provide light refreshments (such as coffee, tea, water, and snacks) so people have time to stay, talk, reflect on what they just experienced, and unpack together.

Step 7 — Have Support People Ready to Debrief: Have a few supportive people (such as Equity/SOGIE leads, wellness staff, peer supporters, or Elders) available in the room to debrief with attendees.

Why Debriefing & Emotional Support Matter After the Ceremony

A Transgender Day of Remembrance ceremony can feel very heavy. For staff, caregivers, volunteers, or community partners who are trans, Two-Spirit, non-binary, or part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, hearing about violence against trans people hits very close to home. For people attending their very first TDOR vigil, it can also be a lot to take in.

Making space for light refreshments (in person) and having supportive people available to talk and unpack (both in person and virtually) ensures no one has to rush straight back to work carrying that emotional weight alone.

Ceremony Step	Virtual Event	In-Person Event
Background Visuals	Share screen playing the Remembering Our Dead PowerPoint slideshow.	Show the Remembering Our Dead PowerPoint slideshow on a room screen.
Music (Optional)	Play soft classical or somber music through screen-share audio.	Play soft classical or somber music quietly in the room.
Candles	Attendees can light a candle at home if they wish.	Provide small candles (or LED tea lights) for attendees to light at the start.
Reading Names	Readers read from a shared list of youth 25 & under (or full list).	Readers read from printed memorial pages with photos for youth 25 & under (or full list).
Closing	Leader thanks attendees and reminds everyone why this work matters.	Leader thanks attendees and invites everyone to stay for light refreshments.
Support & Unpacking	Have support people available in a virtual breakout room after the call.	Serve light refreshments and have support people in the room to talk and debrief.

5. Ready-to-Use Email Invitation & Speaking Scripts

Feel free to copy, paste, and customize these templates for your agency. Just fill in the bracketed text [like this].

Template A: Sample Invitation Email

Copy-and-Paste Invitation Email (Send 3–4 Weeks Before Your Event)

Subject: Invitation: Observing Transgender Day of Remembrance at [Agency Name] – [Date & Time]

Hello everyone,

Every year on November 20, communities around the world observe Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR) to honor transgender, Two-Spirit, non-binary, and gender-diverse people whose lives were lost to anti-transgender violence and suicide.

As part of our commitment to supporting and affirming 2SLGBTQ+ children, youth, families, and staff, you are warmly invited to attend [Agency Name]'s Transgender Day of Remembrance observance during work hours:

• Date: [Insert Date – Choose a day other than Nov 20 if a local community event is happening on Nov 20]
• Time: [Insert Time During Work Hours, e.g., 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM]
• Location / Link: [Insert Room Name or Virtual Meeting Link]
• Refreshments & Support: [In-Person: Light refreshments will be provided after the ceremony so we can reflect and connect. / Virtual: A virtual debrief room will stay open after the ceremony.]

Attending Local Community Events on November 20:
We also encourage everyone to support local community vigils taking place on November 20. You can find a list of Transgender Day of Remembrance events happening across Ontario on the OACAS SOGIE webpage: https://www.oacas.org/sogie/

Volunteering to Read Names:
During our ceremony, we will read aloud the names of young people aged 25 and under while playing the global memorial presentation. If you would like to volunteer to read a short list of names, please reply to [Insert Name/Email] by [Insert Date].

Take Care of Yourself: Please note that this ceremony honors lives lost to violence and suicide. Support people from [Insert Team/Names] will be available during and after the gathering if you would like to talk or debrief.

Warmly,
[Insert Signature / Leadership / Equity & SOGIE Committee]

Script B: Sample Opening Remarks (Connecting TDOR to Child Welfare)

Have your host or speaker read this introduction right after the Land Acknowledgement (and candle lighting, if in person).

Read-Aloud Opening Script

[Start the 'Remembering Our Dead' PowerPoint slideshow on screen in the background.]

"Thank you everyone for joining us today as we pause during our workday to observe Transgender Day of Remembrance.

Observed every year on November 20, Transgender Day of Remembrance was started in 1999 by advocate Gwendolyn Ann Smith to honor Rita Hester, a Black transgender woman who was murdered in 1998. Today, it is a global day of remembrance to honor all transgender, Two-Spirit, non-binary, and gender-diverse people whose lives were taken by anti-transgender violence and suicide.

For those of us who work in Ontario's child welfare sector, this day carries deep meaning. We know that queer, trans, Two-Spirit, and gender non-conforming children and youth are overrepresented in child welfare—often because they have faced rejection, conflict, or unsafe environments simply for being who they are.

We also know that as a sector, we have a direct impact on the lives of vulnerable youth. When we affirm a young person's gender identity—by respecting their chosen name and pronouns, advocating for affirming homes, and supporting them through any involvement they may have with us, our work has life-saving impacts.

Today, we pause to remember the young people here at home around the world who were not given that same safety and affirmation, and who tragically lost their lives.

In a moment, our volunteer readers will read aloud the names of young people aged 25 and under from the Remembering Our Dead archive—representing the young people we serve across our child welfare programs. As we read their names, the full memorial slideshow will play on screen behind us so that every person lost around the world this past year is acknowledged and seen.

This ceremony can feel very heavy, especially for members of the trans, Two-Spirit, and 2SLGBTQ+ community or for anyone attending for the first time. Please take care of yourself today. [Insert Names] are available [in the room / in our virtual breakout room] if you would like to talk or unpack at any point. We will now begin the reading of the names."

Script C: Sample Leadership Closing Remarks

Read-Aloud Closing Script for Leadership (After Reading of Names & Moment of Silence)

[Pause for a moment of silence after the last name is read.]

"Thank you to all of our readers for sharing those names with such care, and thank you to everyone here for taking time out of your workday to remember with us.

Every name we heard today—and every person we saw on screen—deserved to grow up safe, supported, and celebrated. In child welfare, our remembrance continues through our daily actions: by standing up against transphobia, by supporting our trans, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse colleagues and community partners, and by making sure every child and youth we serve feels safe and affirmed.

[FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS]: Before you head to your next meeting, please take a few quiet moments for yourself. If you would like to talk, reflect, or unpack what you experienced today, [Insert

> Names] will stay in [this meeting / Breakout Room 1] for the next [30 minutes]. Thank you for being here and for the important work you do every day."
>
> [FOR IN-PERSON EVENTS]: We have light refreshments set up in the room. Because a ceremony like this can bring up many emotions—whether this hits close to home for you or this is your first time attending a Transgender Day of Remembrance ceremony—please don't feel you have to rush right back to your desk. We invite you to stay, have some refreshments, and take time to talk and unpack together. [Insert Names] are also here in [Insert Room] if you would like to debrief one-on-one. Thank you for being here today."

6. Quick Event Planning Checklist

Done	When	What to Do
[ ]	**4 Weeks Before**	Check the OACAS SOGIE webpage (oacas.org/sogie) and local community calendars to see if a community TDOR vigil is happening on November 20.
[ ]	**4 Weeks Before**	Pick your agency's event date (choose a different day if a local event is on Nov 20) during regular work hours. (For Indigenous Well-Being Agencies, consult with Elders or Knowledge Keepers on cultural protocols.)
[ ]	**3–4 Weeks Before**	Decide who is invited (all staff, plus optional foster parents, volunteers, and 2SLGBTQ+ community partners) and send out calendar invites.
[ ]	**2 Weeks Before**	Confirm your speakers (Land Acknowledgement, Opening Speaker, Leadership Closer) and ask for volunteers to read names.
[ ]	**1–2 Weeks Before**	Confirm who will be available during and after the event to help attendees debrief and unpack.
[ ]	**1 Week Before**	For In-Person Events: Order light refreshments, buy small candles (or LED tea lights), and book a room with a projector/screen.
[ ]	**3–5 Days Before**	Go to tdor.translivesmatter.info to download the PowerPoint slideshow. Filter the list for youth 25 & under, divide the names among readers, and print the individual photo pages for in-person readers.