

THE SIMCOE COUNTY
LGBT YOUTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT
MAKING IT BETTER TODAY

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We would like to thank the members of the **Community Partners Committee of Simcoe County (CPC)**, the working committee responsible for supporting the development of the entire needs assessment process:



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**O.S.S.T.F. DISTRICT 17,
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE**



**SIMCOE-MUSKOKA DISTRICT
HEALTH UNIT**

Throughout the duration of the project different organizations and businesses supported our work by offering space for our meetings and focus groups: AIDS Committee of Simcoe County; Essa Rd Event Centre; Orillia Youth Centre; DIY: An Art Collective and, participating Gay Straight Alliances.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June of 2011 the Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line partnered with various community-based organizations and individuals in Simcoe County to implement their program, *“Youth Line Loves Simcoe County”* to build capacity and community for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. In addition to developing an event with LGBT youth and their allies, the Community Partners Committee of Simcoe County conducted a county-wide needs assessment report engaging LGBT youth, allies, service providers and educators. The needs assessment entitled, *“Simcoe County LGBT Youth Needs Assessment: Making It Better Today”*, was supported by the Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line and funded through the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Community Partners Committee of Simcoe County was responsible for its development, implementation, analysis and dissemination. In total there were 157 LGBT youth, allies, service providers and educators who participated in online surveys, focus groups and participatory art methods from August 2011 to January 2012.

KEY FINDINGS

Community Consultation Survey

- 82.8 % of participants identified that they provide a safe space for LGBT youth, however only 4% of LGBT youth who participated identified that they access a community organization for support.
- 58.1% of participants reported receiving requests of support for youth however, at the time of this survey, the only LGBT specific supports available to youth are GSAs and the Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line.
- Community organizations made up 38 % of respondents and educational institutions made up 26% of represented organizations and institutions.
- 58% of respondents were providing direct service to youth, while 12% were in management roles, 18% in coordination roles and 6% were responsible for policy development.
- Only 41.4% of participants felt that they had adequate training on LGBT issues.

LGBT Youth Survey

- In total 46.9% of participants heard homophobic comments on a daily basis while 31.7% heard transphobic and negative gender related comments daily.
- While 75 % of youth wanted community-based programs, 70% of youth also felt there was a need for community-based mental health programs.
- Social participation opportunities were most important for LGBT youth as 79.7 % of participants requested LGBT dances and 76.6% would like another GSA conference.
- 51% of participants are dealing with verbal harassment about their LGBT identity.
- 23.6% of youth have had thoughts of ending their life and 32.7% are dealing with anxiety, depression or self-harm.
- 23.6% identified substance use as an issue they are dealing with.
- Overall 41.8% of youth identified that they are struggling with parental and family acceptance.
- 21.8% of youth who participated identified that spirituality and religion is an issue that they are currently struggling with.

LGBT Youth Focus Groups

- Themes around safety, support, barriers and experiences of oppression emerged within the focus groups.
- The interconnection among these themes must be understood in the development of space for LGBT youth.
- LGBT youth felt that there was a need for both LGBT friendly and LGBT specific services
- Differences emerged between the youth who had support in their school environment and those that did not.
- There was a divide between supported youth who want integration and youth who are unsupported and are seeking more LGBT identity development, validation around their experiences of oppression and an LGBT community that is visible.

10 ACTION STEPS: *MAKING IT BETTER TODAY*

These action steps were created to operate on a continuum to recognize the unique needs and capacity of those who are working on behalf of youth.

We recommend that those who work on behalf of youth:

Acknowledge and take action to educate the larger community that behaviours such as physical violence (kicking, shoving, hitting, throwing), physical harassment (threatening postures, actions), verbal harassment (name calling, verbal threats, talking about someone's sexual and gender identity), emotional abuse (isolating you from the group, treating you differently, stereotyping, making fun of how you dress) are actually behaviours that are rooted in *homophobia, bi-phobia and transphobia to gain power and control over the oppressed individual.*

Understand and challenge societal structures such as heterosexism, heteronormativity and gender expectations that are viewed as the norm and understand them as one way of being and not the only way of being.

Collaborate with large multi-service, county wide programs/organizations to encourage widespread engagement with the work conducted by the Community Partners Committee to address the issues raised by LGBT youth.

Motivate and support organizations to start increasing their capacity to work with LGBT youth by investing in training for their staff that incorporates anti-oppression principles.

Encourage organizations to assess how their current policies, practices and procedures could be adjusted to reflect and support the LGBT community.

Request that those organizations that have policies, procedures and practices in place liaise, share and offer support to organizations that are in developmental phases of adopting policies, procedures and practices.

Adopt and apply a change management perspective that supports the entire organization throughout the change process.

Make information available and visible in your organization and educational institutions that reflect the LGBT community. Find ways to identify your organization or group to LGBT youth.

Commit to learning about and going into LGBT youth communities. Collaborate with GSAs. Make your resources available at LGBT events and have resources on your website, social media pages and in your literature that speak to the LGBT community.

Assist in reuniting the LGBT Network of Simcoe County to work on the solutions and action steps identified in this report.

The remainder of this report is organized by discussing the background, rationale, framework and needs assessment model. We then move into the methodology, results, limitations and considerations for the future. Finally we offer the *10 Action Steps: Making It Better Today*. A glossary of terms is provided at the back of this report for your reference.

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

In June 2010, Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line, in partnership with individuals and organizations in Simcoe County began collaborating on a community development project. The Simcoe County LGBT Network provided a letter of support to accompany their funding application to The Ontario Trillium Foundation. Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line successfully secured funding for a two year project to work in four regions (Simcoe County, Renfrew County, Chatham-Kent and Kingston) that are under-represented and under-resourced for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, 2-spirit, queer youth between 15-26 years of age. The grant is based on the successful pilot project in 2009 implemented in Sudbury called, “Fabulous: A Youth Symposium”.

Youth Line began working with Byrch Consulting & Associates to assemble a working group known as the Community Partners Committee (CPC), consisting of relevant stakeholders to determine the shape, design and execution of the project. There were three youth who stepped forward to join the Youth Committee that developed the Rainbow Haunt, a one day LGBT youth community social event that took place on October 22, 2011.

The CPC was comprised of representatives from a variety of organizations, along with community members. CPC supported the development of the Rainbow Haunt and also identified a great need for specific programs and services beyond this one-time event for LGBT youth. The committee determined the best way to acquire those programs while simultaneously building community capacity, would be to conduct a community-based needs assessment and report on the needs of LGBT youth and service providers within Simcoe County. A capacity-building process was identified as a means in addressing the historical barriers of implementing services, and would hopefully create a foundation to obtain sustainable supports for future program development and implementation. Participatory art methods were also used to collect data; however we are not interpreting what the art work means, as its dissemination is intended to create visibility and dialogue within the community.

It is our intention to author this report in a way that is accessible and user friendly for youth, students, community service providers, educators, parents, activists and policy makers: A document for everyone. We hope you are able to gain some awareness to the issues LGBT youth face, what community service providers are doing and the work that is left to do, to create the kind of Simcoe County that is responsive to the needs of LGBT youth and will support the development of programs. We hope you find this report insightful, useful in what you do and that it will motivate change in our community.

RATIONALE: HISTORY OF LGBT ORGANIZING IN SIMCOE COUNTY

Community organizing for the LGBT community in Simcoe County has been traced back to the early 1990's and has included faith-based communities, various community-based committees, social groups and school-based supports. A common theme for community based supports (drop-ins, support groups, social supports) is that they have either relied on fundraising from a small pool of supporters, have been offered for a fee (dances) or have been sponsored through an organization.

The H.O.P.E. Theatre Troupe (offered through the AIDS Committee of Simcoe County) was a program that had some success with securing funding in the late 1990's, however it was limited. Although not an LGBT specific program, LGBT youth found it to be a safe space. In the early 2000's the program was no longer sustainable due to lack of funding. The LGBT Youth Drop-In, a sponsored program of the AIDS Committee of Simcoe County had success in the early 2000's although the program depended on community fundraisers and in-kind donations. Eventually this program could no longer sustain itself.

Since the early 2000's there have been a few different community member run committees that have addressed different social needs for adults. In the mid-2000's Gay Straight Alliances started to be implemented in the school system, however it wasn't until 2011 that LGBT youth support was available in the community again through the LGBT Youth Connection and U19 LGBT youth dances in Barrie, held at Essa Rd Event Centre.

During the mid to late 2000's different stakeholders started to surface. Professional development opportunities were first offered through the Diversity Committee, eventually re-established as Opening Closets Committee. These educational opportunities were implemented to inform and train a variety of workers on sexual diversity and LGBT issues. In 2009 the Opening Closets conference had a particular focus on LGBT youth, although this committee has to the best of our knowledge been non-active since 2010. In 2010 the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation District 17 Human Rights Committee organized their first conference for students who participate in their Gay Straight Alliances. Conferences were organized in 2010 and 2011 to support students through educational and leadership development. In the last few years The Simcoe County Children's Aid Society has also recognized LGBT issues that relate to youth by hosting The International Day Against Homophobia to support and educate children and families about the issues faced by the LGBT community.

In 2009, Rainbow Health Ontario, was implemented as a provincial organization to address health, equity policy and research within LGBT communities with a hired representative in each Local Health Integrated Network (LHIN). A forum was sponsored by Rainbow Health Ontario at Georgian College in 2009 to bring together service providers. A small group of stakeholders came together to form the LGBT Network of Simcoe County. This committee was starting to identify the themes discussed above; programs are often run by community-members or through small organizations dependent on fundraising efforts that cannot sustain the need. The LGBT Network of Simcoe County tried to secure funding to conduct a needs assessment although they were unsuccessful. At the time they did provide a letter of support for Youth Line to secure funding for a capacity-building project, which has been the program that has allowed the Simcoe County LGBT Youth Needs Assessment to happen.

In 2011 two Ryerson University students identified a need to support LGBT youth in Simcoe County. They started the LGBT Youth Connection with their own resources. They eventually became connected with the Community Partners Committee and GSA Conference Planning committee. To provide continued support The AIDS Committee of Simcoe County has sponsored this community group to ensure the support that was started in 2011 continues for LGBT youth in Simcoe County. A timeline of LGBT organizing has been developed to provide an illustration of the work that has been done.



In the last twenty years there has been a lot of work done, in different ways and by different people to build community. The Community Partners Committee is currently carrying on the work the LGBT Network of Simcoe County had identified and hopefully this will be the beginning of a collaborative approach to developing and implementing services.

COMMUNITY-BASED NEEDS ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

The *Simcoe County LGBT Youth Needs Assessment* utilized an integrated anti-oppression framework that recognizes LGBT youth as a priority community for Simcoe County. CPC has been dedicated to exploring how LGBT youth experience the world when impacted by various forms of oppression. We also understand that at times their experiences of homophobia, transphobia and bi-phobia may intersect with racism, sexism, classism and ableism.

Further to this, we understand that these experiences of oppression can be experienced through verbal and physical harassment, violence and abuse, verbal and physical threats, online harassment, and isolation from a variety of people in their life. There may be times when LGBT youth may not have experienced these acts of oppression, however, knowing that they do and can happen, creates fear, isolation and possible life choices to avoid these experiences. Thus, oppression can either be real in that an individual is experiencing harassment and/or violence, or perceived in that they may fear that it will happen. We need to think about what we can do, as a community, so that LGBT youth don't have to make this choice.

HOMOPHOBIA:

"(actual and perceived), violence, depression, addiction, anxiety, homelessness, family rejection and abuse, general fear, health issues, lack of medical care, lack of sexual health education, suicidal thoughts/actions/tendencies, employment issues, social interaction limitation/restrictions, lack of social/family/community networks, lack of safety/feeling safe at home/school/in community, etc."

— Community Consultation Participant

Our framework must also challenge hetero-normative structures and heterosexism, as heterosexuality and the structures that support heterosexuality are deemed a societal norm. We believe that these constructs make everything outside of it seem abnormal, hence why we need to challenge these structures, as we do not view LGBT youth as abnormal. Further to this, societal expectations of gender (girl, boy, man, woman) that are based on expressions connected to biological sex can have a damaging impact on youth who don't conform to these expectations.

HETERO-NORMATIVITY:

"A consensus that rests on authoritative and officially sanctioned truths always silences alternatives truths, marginalizes diversity and reduces it to abnormality"

— McNaughton (2006)

Thus, we understand gender as occurring on a continuum that may or may not be connected to an individual's biological sex. Experiencing oppression can cause impacts that can be interconnected with or lead to homelessness, educational barriers, poverty, mental/physical health, sexual

health and trauma. Due to this interconnectedness we understand these issues through a social determinant of health lens. It is our hope that community members, organizations and stakeholders utilize an anti-oppression approach when working with LGBT communities to fully understand the depth of experiences and realities that exist for LGBT youth in Simcoe County.

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH:

“We believe that the social, cultural, political and economic context of peoples’ lives has a big impact on their health. We recognize sexual orientation and gender identity as determinants of health that impact health and wellness. We consider the social determinants of health when we plan and offer services, engage in advocacy activities and develop community and health system partnerships. We strive to understand and influence policies that will strengthen the communities we serve”.

— Rainbow Health Ontario

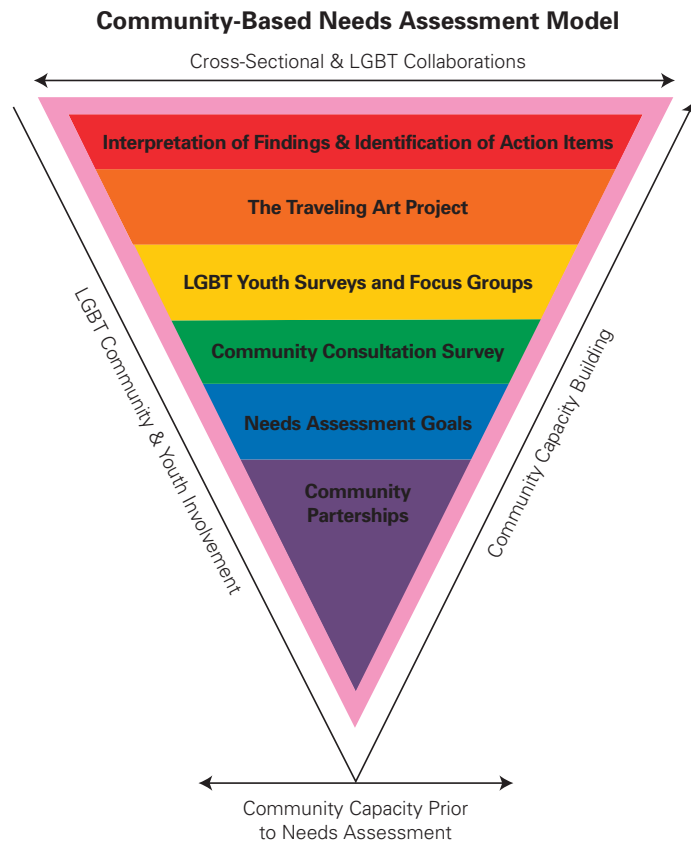
NEEDS ASSESSMENT GOALS

A formal process to gather information about the needs of LGBT youth in Simcoe County has, to our knowledge, never occurred before. To develop a formalized process, the CPC designed the needs assessment around three main goals:

- 1. Provide exposure in Simcoe County about the needs and issues facing LGBT youth.**
 - Engaging in this process provides visibility to an invisible community.
 - Identifying the needs and issues will help inform service providers, policy makers and educators.
- 2. Create collaborative opportunities for service providers, allies and LGBT youth to dialogue.**
 - Applying a By Community For Community approach that integrates everyone involved at all levels.
 - Ensuring that the needs assessment is accessible across-sectors, throughout Simcoe County and to people in a variety of roles.
 - Allowing LGBT youth opportunities to dialogue with service providers.
- 3. Develop tangible tools to educate and share information gained from the needs assessment process.**
 - Create arts-based participatory action opportunities to engage LGBT youth and their allies. Appreciate art as a tool to support youth, create visibility and educate the community.
 - Develop a needs assessment report available online in a variety of locations to share the results with LGBT youth, service providers, educators and the larger Simcoe County community.
 - Ensure that key findings and action steps are accessible to those who need it.
 - Organize a community launch and collaborate with various planning tables, committees and coalitions to share the results of the needs assessment in a presentation format.

COMMUNITY BASED NEEDS ASSESSMENT MODEL: BY THE COMMUNITY, FOR THE COMMUNITY

Understanding how power operates in society and the role it plays in the lives of those who are experiencing oppression, our needs assessment model was designed to challenge those notions of power. We ensured that members of the LGBT community and the youth community were engaged in all aspects of the needs assessment process and at all levels. The development of the needs assessment model, collection of data and dissemination has included LGBT members, youth and allies to promote the development of relationships and capacity building across communities and sectors.



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Data collection was based on our community-based needs assessment model with each method building on and informing the next stage of data collection. There were no statistical procedures or standardized measures used during data collection; however we did employ a variety of research methods to gather information for the needs assessment. Questions, focus group design and informed consent forms were developed and vetted through the CPC at each stage of the process. Survey Monkey was employed to gather and analyze the data from the surveys and audio transcriptions were used to analyze the contextual data from the focus groups.

METHODOLOGY

LGBTQ Youth

- Youth who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, 2-Spirit, queer and questioning between the ages of 15-26 were welcome to participate. We also considered that some youth may not use these identities so terms such as ‘being in a same-sex relationship’, ‘attracted to the same-sex’, ‘gender non-conforming’, ‘gender-queer’ were used to facilitate participation.

Service Providers & Community Stakeholders

- Service providers and community stakeholders have been identified as community-based organizations, educators, health services, community service groups, community mental health services, income support services, employment services and family based organizations. Individuals in these settings could be employed in a variety of roles with varying responsibilities.

1. Community Consultation Survey

- Combination of 26 qualitative and quantitative questions.
- Available online for 30 days.
- 50 participants.
- 50% survey completion rate.

2. LGBT Youth Survey

- Combination of 15 quantitative and qualitative questions.
- Available online, in poster format, at LGBT youth events and in GSA’s for 2 months.
- 67 participants.
- 94.5% survey completion rate.

3. LGBT Youth Focus Groups

- 2 focus groups offered in 2 separate communities in Simcoe County.
- 4 broad qualitative questions supported by probing questions.
- Same questions for each focus group.
- Audio taped and recorded on flip charts during the focus group.
- Participants had an opportunity to go through our written recordings to ensure the facilitators accurately captured their responses.

4. Participatory Art Method

- Initially used as a way to collect responses to the last question in the focus group.
- Opened up this opportunity to youth involved in GSA’s.
- 30 participants.
- 30 pieces of art work.
- Open to LGBT youth and their allies.
- To be exhibited in different locations across Simcoe County to educate and create visibility and dialogue about LGBT issues.

5. Informant Interviews

- Over 20 individuals expressed interest in the community consultation survey.
- We were unable to do any informant interviews due to lack of resources and time to conduct the interviews, finance the transcriptions and analyze the data.

The methods used in the needs assessment supported our goal to connect with various communities and stakeholders across Simcoe County. The project was time-limited and lacked the resources needed; however with the resources we had we were able to capture the experiences and ideas of 157 LGBT youth, allies, service providers and stakeholders. The data gained from these methods has allowed us to identify the needs, issues and barriers as we move forward to enhance a supportive community for LGBT youth and to work on Making It Better Today.

RESULTS: BUILDING A PICTURE OF SIMCOE COUNTY

There are a number of service providers operating in Simcoe County and of those that participated in the community consultation survey, 24% identified as community-based organizations and 26 % identified that they were from educational institutions. This is important because for many of the youth who participated, these may be the two environments where youth spend most of their time. Of the respondents to the survey, 58% said they provide direct service in their current role and 36% identified as a teacher or educator, another 26 % of respondents identified their role as manager, supervisor, programmer or policy developer.

Of the organizations that participated in the survey, 63.8% provide prevention and education, 62% provide social supports and 42.6% provide practical supports. Case management and residential support were also identified as key programs provided to youth in Simcoe County.

Of the youth who access these community based and educational services the organizations identified that 74% of the youth range from ages 10-19 and another 25% are between 20-26 years of age. Of the organizations that participated in the survey 40% felt that their organization currently had services available

that were geared towards LGBT youth. Nearly half (47%) of respondents felt that they were aware of LGBT services, however most of these respondents identified as educators. Interestingly, 58 % of those who participated explained that they received requests for support from LGBT youth. Of the 58% the majority identified as working in a community-based organization.

What type of setting are you working in?

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Community Based Organization | 24.0% |
| Community Group | 2.0% |
| Service Group | 2.0% |
| Educational Institution | 26.0% |
| Government Organization | 4.0% |
| Other | 19.0% |

What type of service(s) are you offering to youth?

| | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| Case Management | 34.0% |
| Practical Support | 42.6% |
| Residential | 25.5% |
| Social Support | 61.7% |
| Prevention and Education | 63.8% |

“...These students that are aware early are being left un-supported in a very verbally violent, responded to with hurtful words and emotionally violated daily but the way other students act towards anyone who may be or is a GLBT member. It’s sick, we do everything to provide an education for these kids, but leave them questioning and in the dark about who they are until they are in grade 9? It’s an abomination to our community, country and I hope it changes really soon. Too many kids are being told they are wrong when no one knows what is right”.

— Elementary School Teacher Community Consultation Participant

WHAT LGBT YOUTH HAVE TO SAY

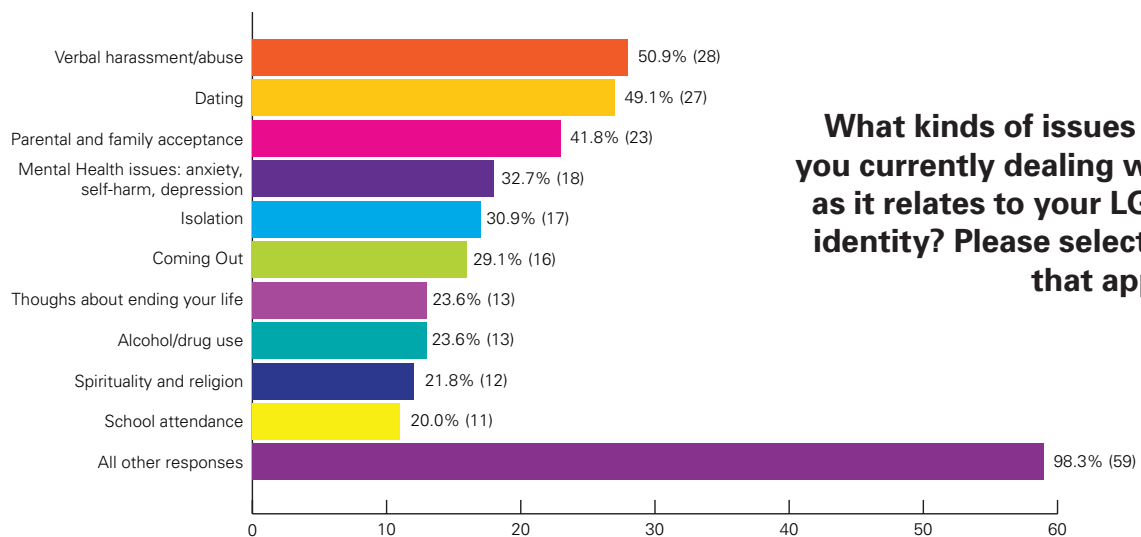
There were 67 youth who participated in the online LGBT Youth Survey. Of the youth who disclosed their age, 5% were aged 10-14, 67% were aged 15-19 and 24% were aged 20-26 years of age and 4% were above 26 years of age. These numbers are probably a reflection of age of consent and access to youth in our school system and community-based programs. Youth were asked to identify relationships that were most supportive of their LGBT identity and the top 5 relationships identified were:

| | |
|----------------|--------------|
| Friends | 93.8% |
| Family | 77.0% |
| Teacher | 43.5% |
| School | 45.3% |
| Partner | 34.4% |

It is important to note that there are many aspects to each of these relationships that deserve to be explored further, as there could be several components that contribute, or do not contribute to these results. This is where standardized measures are useful, as there may be other variables at play that are beyond the scope of a community-based needs assessment. It does however provide us with a very basic understanding that these relationships can be supportive ones and requires further exploration as to why this is.

Using a Likert Scale, we asked youth participants to rate how LGBT friendly Simcoe County is and 60% said not at all to somewhat and 40% said good to extremely good. To understand this difference we can look at how the youth in the focus groups experienced this reality. The focus groups revealed that of the 10 who participated, 60% of them identified Simcoe County as LGBT friendly. Of those youth who identified Simcoe County as LGBT friendly they had all been involved with a GSA in their school environment. The GSA's that these youth were apart of had solid support from school administration, teachers and allies. Not all GSA's receive the same support, nor are all of them as well established, so a GSA's impact does vary from school to school.

When it comes to youth being able to express their sexual orientation and gender identity, 42% felt that they could do this safely and they felt the safest place to do this was with friends. The youth participants identified significant issues they were struggling with and only one participant expressed they are not dealing with any of these issues:



What this tells us is that many of the youth who participated are dealing with multiple issues that relate to their LGBT identity; as such they are not viewed as independent of one another. Mental health, suicidal ideation (thoughts about taking your life), and substance use is of particular concern because of those who participated only 1% accessed a nurse and there were no participants who accessed a doctor for support. Similarly only 4% accessed a community-based organization. When viewing these issues through a social determinant of health lens we can understand how the high rates of verbal harassment, family acceptance, isolation and coming out can have an impact on mental health and coping skills. Although this analysis would benefit from standardized measures, this data does help to raise awareness as to the issues that LGBT youth are dealing with. In addition to the above issues 94% of respondents hear homophobic comments while 87 % of the respondents hear transphobic comments. The youth who participated in this survey have opened up to share some alarming realities and as individuals employed to support youth in a variety of different roles, we need to listen.

“Harassment and lack of support in their self-expression from peers and adults in their community. For example, “If you wouldn’t dress/talk/walk/look/behave that way, you wouldn’t have these problems” AKA the harassment is your own fault”

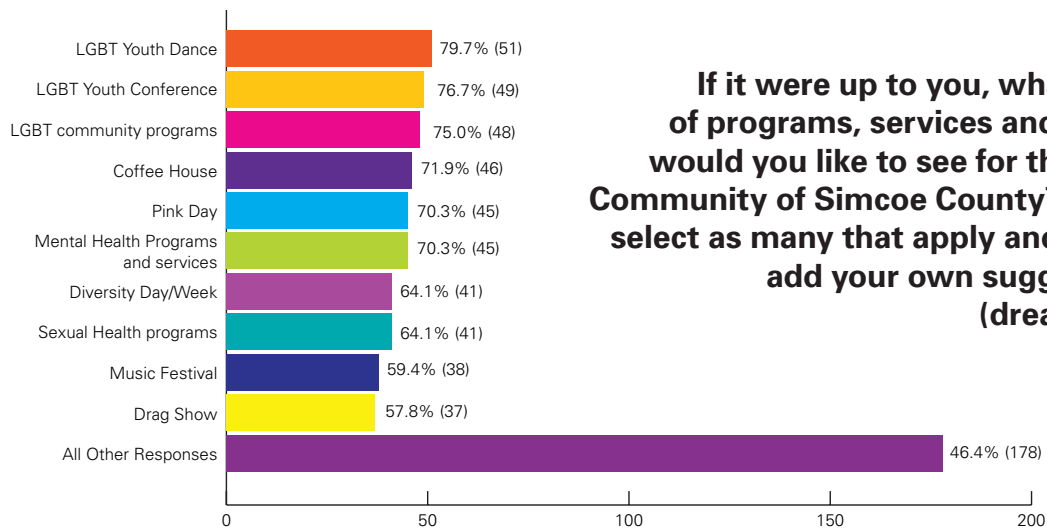
— Community Consultation Participant

While 45% of organizational respondents felt they had received LGBT specific training within their organization, only 38% felt that the training was adequate. Of these same organizational respondents only 52% felt their organization had policies, procedures and practices in place to guide and support the work of LGBT youth. What was encouraging was that 55% of organizational respondents felt their organization could support the development of LGBT programming.

“Yeah, I’m lucky because I have a Mom who’s not only just um, an open and loving parent no matter what, but, she’s involved in the social service sector so it’s, it’s rather normal there. So I’m, I’m very lucky in that sense. But I know many people that have had parents kick them out. Things like that, um, so...”

— Focus Group Participant

What is clear when examining the responses from LGBT identified youth who participated in the online survey and focus groups is there is a disconnect between what community based organizations and educational institutions/agencies feel they are providing and what the LGBT youth themselves feel they need and that organizations are not fully providing. In fact, 87 % of youth who responded go to their friends for support. What this means for community-based organizations and educational institutions is that if youth are supporting each other in a significant way then we need to ensure our youth have the right, correct information in order that they make informed choices and knowledge exchange when speaking to each other. Further there would be the need to develop supportive tools and mechanisms within the community to encourage and support our youth. The LGBT Youth Survey provided participants with an opportunity to suggest programs and supports that they would like to see implemented in Simcoe County:



If it were up to you, what kinds of programs, services and events would you like to see for the LGBT Community of Simcoe County? Please select as many that apply and please add your own suggestions (dream big)!

LGBT FOCUS GROUPS

There were two focus groups run in Simcoe County in the late summer and early fall in two separate communities. Based on information gained from the community consultation survey the CPC designed questions that were based on the following categories:

1. Experiences
2. Barriers
3. Safety
4. Support

“... For my whole life, I was just worried about family acceptance, and wanted to have children. Staying in the closet seemed to be the only option. I had always heard the argument that, children of same-sex parents result in having several issues... That, ‘a child needs both a man and woman to have a balanced life..’ and, I didn’t want any children of mine to be a victim of severe bullying because their parents are gay. After have come out, I now see all the misconceptions I was believing. But, moreover, if I wanted to be a great parent, I had to be happy myself, and hiding in a heterosexual relationship, would only continue to make me depressed”

— Youth Survey Participant

Within each category specific themes began emerging:

1. Experiences
 - Want LGBT Specific –when experiencing on-going homophobia
 - Want LGBT Friendly-when their school and home environment is supportive
2. Barriers
 - Isolation and societal values

3. Safety

- Staying safe, existing safe spaces and identifying safe space

4. Support

- Relationships, school and community
- LGBT specific vs. LGBT friendly

Experiences

Youth in the focus groups discussed the different forms of homophobia that they were experiencing. One participant describes how they experienced physical violence:

“I personally um, for example I was, when walking home from school, walking home from school one night, um, had an object (removed to protect identity) thrown at me from a moving vehicle so um, that was like one of the big things that kind of instilled the fear was not only the whispering in the hallways but then there was um, a very serious physical attempt” (Sp3-09).

Another youth described feeling unsafe when they anticipate and fear having to deal with verbal harassment by saying:

“...having to worry about people driving by yelling, “faggot”, you know” (Sp3-09).

Homophobia can sometimes manifest itself in more subtle ways and LGBT identified youth can experience other peoples’ values and judgments without actions actually happening. One youth participant describes how this happens in a classroom environment:

“With me and that class (health class), it was more so um, sit down, shut up, get through the class and leave. Like yeah, they touch base on um, same sex relationships just a little bit. Um, but I mean at the same time, if they go into detail and people know about you, it’s...there’s a good chance that you’re the only one in that class. And then, when they’re talking about it, everybody’s thinking about you. And, I dunno, it doesn’t seem like they can do that with these same class of people” (Sp1-10).

Another youth shares their thoughts about how uncomfortable the majority of students feel when teachers talk about same-sex relationships:

“Like, I’m uncomfortable, why can’t other people be uncomfortable while I learn about what I would like to learn about?” (Sp5-10).

The focus groups revealed the different forms of oppression that LGBT youth are experiencing, and although the latter may not seem to be as extreme, it is these forms of homophobia that are intrinsically connected to heterosexism and hetero-normative structures that LGBT youth must contend with.

Barriers

Two major barriers youth identified was isolation and societal values that can make it difficult to access services and support. One participant states:

“So before I came out, I was really scared because somehow in my mind I thought it was wrong, No one in my family had ever told me, you know, being gay is wrong, so I feel like the community put it into my mind” (Sp 1-09).

Youth were able to recognize that their world is engulfed with heterosexual norms, yet they were able to develop their LGBT identity despite having received little to no social cues that it is okay to be outside of heterosexual norms. Although schools have much needed support such as GSA's, support outside of the school environment is limited. One participant describes this by stating:

“Seems like, other than schools which for the most part are LGBT pro for the most part, there isn't easily accessible locations or places to feel like there is real support there. There aren't many around. So yeah, the Guidance Department is a good place to go, but other than that there aren't many places other than a close friend” (Sp-10).

Limited support only increases the experience of isolation that LGBT youth are dealing with. Youth spoke about how 'LGBT' support is not easily identified, even in the school environment and one participant states:

“I'd definitely go to a friend's house. Um, or talk to a friend or something. Um, I know that in guidance there actually are people to talk to about that. I know there's one teacher at our school... and she's the kind of person that you can just go to and talk to about those sorts of things, but nobody really knows about it. So, like I didn't know about that until last year. Not because I went, like I've never been, but um, yeah” (Sp1-10).

Making the resources we do have, visible and accessible to youth is one way to address this barrier that emerged in the focus groups. When information is by word of mouth it reinforces norms that don't include LGBT identified youth and further isolates them.

Safety

The focus group participants discussed their perceptions of safety in terms of real and perceived homophobia and having to assess safety. One participant states:

“I don't think it's so much something I look for in a positive space it's more so just stay away from negative spaces. Cause in general I'm fairly neutral about where I go but, you know where not to go” (Sp1-10).

All of the youth in this focus group identified with this statement and expressed that they travel in groups, avoid the smoking section, certain downtown areas (in their community) and some (not all) are cautious in school change rooms as a way to keep themselves safe. When trying to assess safety within a community-based setting one participant describes:

“I think it's really important 'cause you don't want to get into an uncomfortable situation where you pour your heart out to someone and then have them be like, Oh, you're gay. So I think it's important to sort of know ahead of time” (Sp4-09).

“I think a lot of them like, community services, have mission statements or philosophies and stuff that are available to read on their literature on-line in them, etc. and a lot of the time they promote anti-discrimination against certain groups. I think just writing that (LGBT language) into there would just be sort of a subtle way”

— Focus Group Participant

When assessing safety within the community another participant describes how assumptions are made:

“I think there needs to be like, with the government thing, there needs to be positive space government offices, I guess. Because, I did my co-op at a government office kind of thing and it was, now, my ex-boss... she would like ask me ‘oh, do you have a boyfriend’ and like, I just didn’t feel like I could tell her ‘well, uh, actually...’”(Sp 1-09).

Having to assess and worry about another person’s reaction can create situations that are uncomfortable for LGBT youth. As a result youth are put into positions where they are taking a risk around disclosing their sexual orientation.

“This survey alone shows hope that Simcoe could change for the better. That people associated as LGBT might have more support, and hopefully more places to go to feel safe. But hopefully more awareness in the community...hopefully end the LGBT suicides, or prevent them in our area. P.s Thank You for Doing this Survey”

— Youth Survey Participant

Support

Overwhelmingly youth believed there is a need for safe space, of some kind or another, that can act as support for them. Despite the fact we have had GSAs in most of our public high schools for some time now, GSAs are not necessarily the best route to encourage safety either:

“I guess there is always an awkward moment when you’re like, walking down the hall and go to the door and everyone knows that’s where the GSA is” (Sp4-09).

Another student describes the feeling of accessing the GSA as,

“I guess yeah, walking to the school and like everyone knowing and the stares, the whispers, in the lobby and stuff. I hated walking through the hallways I would always stay in big groups” (Sp1-09).

Some participants described particular classes and teachers who created a safe and supportive environment:

“We had an English teacher her name, well I’m not gonna say her name, but she was like, unexpectedly, like, the most amazing teacher I ever had. And she would let us do all our English projects surrounding the LGBT community. So like, we read Frankenstein and our project was we had to compare Frankenstein to being a gay kid. (You) know, he’s an outsider, no one accepts him, so like that and we got an amazing mark” (Sp1-09).

Providing safe and supportive environments for LGBT youth fosters confidence and resilience. Youth described classes such as those in the social sciences or arts as being more supportive of an LGBT identity and learning:

“I like classes where you , sometimes, I find like, the teacher I connect with and understands your situation. Some of them are fine with it some of them are um, close minded” (Sp2-09).

Other classes were not as supportive:

“Math class I always hated going to because, I don’t know, it just seemed like the math teachers weren’t paying attention to what the other kids were doing like, there would always be someone like throwing pieces of paper with like dyke written on it” (Sp1-09).

“I figure each year there is a new group (of students) that come into (our school), um, and they’re gonna be there for 4 years so I mean if you start advertising now that it’s a positive space...there always has to be a starting point, so if you start it now, then in 4 years’ time it will be a norm”

— Focus Group Participant

When LGBT youth are faced with this kind of harassment in their classroom and in front of their peers, without the intervention of those in power, the impacts of homophobia can be understood.

A common thread within the focus groups was the support that they receive from allies and the desire for ‘out’ LGBT teachers, counselors and community workers. The impact allies have had in the school environment and in the community came up throughout both focus groups. Allies have walked them to and from GSAs and challenged oppressive comments. Some allies have taken a leadership role alongside LGBT youth. The participants identified that ally involvement has helped to build awareness, increase acceptance and make LGBT issues more visible. Participants also expressed that as much as they appreciate their allies, they are lacking ‘out’ LGBT role models in the school system and organizations. They believe there is value in being connected to ‘out’ LGBT members to assist them in identifying and participating in community. Some participants expressed this through wanting someone to talk with who really ‘gets it’ and some feel that allies are not able to provide this kind of validation that supports someone through the initial coming out process.

MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

Each of the themes discussed above are interconnected to one another and there can be no separation between them. When working with youth **experiences** of oppression, the impact they have on LGBT youth need to be recognized; especially when considering their relevancy and the need around safe, supportive spaces. The results of the LGBT youth survey and focus groups have indicated the many different forms of homophobia, bi-phobia and transphobia that youth are experiencing. Thus, homophobia, transphobia and bi-phobia as experienced as oppression, should be understood as existing within structures in Simcoe County that form the background of youths' daily lives.

The **barriers** that emerged spoke to isolation and societal values that can contribute to youth having difficulty to accessing safe, supportive spaces. When people hear or see oppressive comments and/or actions they need to be challenged all of the time instead of only challenging comments and/or actions because you know there is an LGBT youth present. At this stage in their lives, youth might not be 'out' to others or themselves, but seeing adults or those in positions of power not challenging homophobia, bi-phobia and transphobia, can increase their feelings of isolation and further stigmatize LGBT identities.

Creating **safety** in our schools, communities and organizations emerged in different ways for youth involved in the focus groups. Safety was described as a physical space where there are indicators such as safe space rainbow stickers and posters, but also as a feeling they get from people. For example, some participants described feeling judged by others from how some people look at them and how they are treated differently. They also described safety in terms of the questions they are asked and assumptions made about them. When they are assumed to be heterosexual, or assume their gender identity, the space then becomes unsafe. Therefore, when creating safe spaces, their experiences of homophobia and transphobia along with barriers of isolation and societal norms must be taken into consideration in order to create an overall 'sense' of safety.

When safe spaces are created that provide youth with a 'sense of safety' and are identifiable (safe space stickers and posters), LGBT youth can feel **supported**. LGBT youth identified support as providing space, acknowledgement of their experiences, opportunity to participate without judgment and acceptance from everyone involved. When the experiences and barriers are acknowledged, we are essentially creating a "*sense of safety*" and ultimately a safe space that is supporting LGBT youth. Thus we cannot set up space, if LGBT youth do not experience a sense of safety from those creating and accessing those spaces, and we've learned we can do this by acknowledging the barriers and experiences: *It's all interconnected.*

When implementing supports for LGBT youth the organization can look at the resources, policies, environment and overall structures that would marginalize (heterosexism + gender conforming expectations) LGBT access to those supports. It should be reviewed how things can be changed so that LGBT youth will be fully accommodated and supported by the entire organiza-

"My one wish for Simcoe County is that we will reach a point where people who are not LGBT will start defending the rights of LGBT youth."

— Youth Survey participant

tion and not by a few LGBT identified or supportive staff. Change management strategies always describe the need for leadership to be a part of the change process, to model the change, communicate the change and hold everyone accountable to that change. The changes required to support LGBT youth are not easy, nor are they simple, but they are necessary. For instance, it is not enough, nor is it a fulsome solution to put positive space stickers up throughout an organization. The staff and the organization need to be fully engaged and informed in the development and creation of a positive environment, with ongoing feedback on the reception of growth within its anti-oppression frameworks. This includes on-going learning and training based in equity, equality and diversity to understand all forms of oppression and their connection to one another.

“By not limiting their support to LGBT Youth when LGBT Elders who have lived experience of the same oppressions could help youth break free from them the same way youth can help LGBT adults overcome them. Support LGBT program for all ages instead of creating oppression based on age divisions”

— LGBT Youth Survey Participant

Needs Assessment Limitations

There have been limitations that are worth mentioning:

1. Survey Monkey

- Administrative functions that we were unaware of when the survey was designed could have enhanced the usefulness of the tool.
- As it is an anonymous on-line tool we couldn't set up controls as to who was filling it out.
- Adult LGBT members and youth aged 10-14 filled out the survey.

2. Standardized Measures

- Employing standardized measures would have allowed us to determine variables and possible relationships between those variables.
- Limits the analysis of the data.

3. Community Consultation Survey

- Although we received 50 surveys there was only 50% survey completion rate and as a result have only been able to depend on certain aspects of the Community Consultation Survey.
- Unable to determine why this is as no pattern was identified.

4. Time-Limited

- Only 6 months was allotted to develop the data collection tools and analyze the data.
- More time would have allowed for more participants to be engaged.

5. Limited Resources

- Lack of financial resources created barriers to conduct key informant interviews.
- Access to researchers employing community based research models would have enhanced the needs assessment.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The Simcoe County LGBT Youth Needs Assessment embraced a broad approach to gain an understanding of who is invested in these issues and to learn from LGBT youth about what they are facing in the current context. The Community Partners Committee took a risk and very ambitious steps because we felt that the time was right. The confirmation we received through the community consultation survey is that Simcoe County is ready and willing to find ways to build community, collaboratively, to support LGBT youth. This project was time limited and youth focused however throughout the process adult members of the LGBT community did engage on social media pages, the community consultation survey and through the LGBT youth survey. What became clear is that some adult members of the LGBT community also want to be engaged on the issues they are struggling with. Just as LGBT youth lack services in the community, so does the larger LGBT community in Simcoe County.

Some of these issues include:

- LGBT parenting and LGBT parenting options.
- Supporting school aged children with LGBT parents.
- Lack of supportive health care providers.
- Social opportunities and community-building.
- LGBT positive counselors, mental health workers and social workers.

Adult members do have access to resources that LGBT youth do not have, however the prevalence and impact of homophobia, bi-phobia and transphobia does not lessen. Issues such as oppression in the workplace, healthcare settings, school system and the neighborhoods in which we live can all be places in which, members of the larger LGBT community can be faced with. These experiences can lead to isolation, fear, harassment, and violence, just as they have for the LGBT youth who engaged in this needs assessment.

Just as the last twenty years has been a process of seeing a variety of different groups, committees and events offered, we know that the next twenty will continue to be a process. Organizations that implement programs, educators who create space within the school system and community members who have been volunteering their resources to plan events, at times are doing this work without the knowledge of what each of us is doing.

The Community Partners Committee has modeled what can and does happen when a collaboration between systems, sectors, and individuals come together to develop common goals and interests. As a result we have created visibility, dialogue and opportunities for participation that we hope will live beyond this report. There is more work to do to fulfill the overall goals of the needs assessment as this is just the beginning of identifying what the needs, issues, challenges and barriers are.

We welcome you to become engaged, ask questions, and utilize the tools provided in this report to support you in your work. As we move forward with increased capacity and newly forged relationships we are confident that the *Simcoe County LGBT Youth Needs Assessment Report* can serve as a foundational document to support the development of programs and services. We hope that the relationships and connections made in the community will continue to flourish so that we can continue to learn from LGBT youth about how to, ***Make It Better Today***

10 ACTION STEPS: MAKING IT BETTER TODAY

These action steps were created to operate on a continuum to recognize the unique needs and capacity of those who are working on behalf of youth.

We recommend that those who work on behalf of youth:

Acknowledge and take action to educate the larger community that behaviours such as physical violence (kicking, shoving, hitting, throwing), physical harassment (threatening postures, actions), verbal harassment (name calling, verbal threats, talking about someone's sexual and gender identity), emotional abuse (isolating you from the group, treating you differently, stereotyping, making fun of how you dress) are actually behaviours that are *rooted in homophobia, bi-phobia and transphobia to gain power and control over the oppressed individual.*

Understand and challenge societal structures such as heterosexism, heteronormativity and gender expectations that are viewed as the norm and understand them as one way of being and not the only way of being.

Collaborate with large multi-service, county wide programs/organizations to encourage widespread engagement with the work conducted by the Community Partners Committee to address the issues raised by LGBT youth.

Motivate and support organizations to start increasing their capacity to work with LGBT youth by investing in training for their staff that incorporates anti-oppression principles.

Encourage organizations to assess how their current policies, practices and procedures could be adjusted to reflect and support the LGBT community.

Request that those organizations that have policies, procedures and practices in place liaise, share and offer support to organizations that are in developmental phases of adopting policies, procedures and practices.

Adopt and apply a change management perspective that supports the entire organization throughout the change process.

Make information available and visible in your organization and educational institutions that reflect the LGBT community. Find ways to identify your organization or group to LGBT youth.

Commit to learning about and going into LGBT youth communities. Collaborate with GSAs. Make your resources available at LGBT events and have resources on your website, social media pages and in your literature that speak to the LGBT community.

Assist in reuniting the LGBT Network of Simcoe County to work on the solutions and action steps identified in this report.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Terms and definitions experience fluidity within LGBT communities. Each individual, group or community may experience these terms differently at different times and in different contexts. As terms do change over time it is important to remember that identity and the terms used can be different for each individual. This glossary of terms is intended to provide a basis of understanding of the many terms that are used within the LGBT community.

This list was retrieved from: <http://www.ok2bme.ca/terms>

Ally: A non-lesbian, gay man or bisexual whose attitudes and behaviour are anti-heterosexist in perspective and who works towards combating homophobia and heterosexism, both on a personal and institutional level.

Asexual: In usage, may refer to a person who is not sexually active, or not sexually attracted to other people.

Biphobia: Intolerance of people who are bisexual.

Bisexual: Bisexual men and women have sexual and romantic attractions to both men and women. Depending upon the person, his or her attraction may be stronger to women or to men, or they may be approximately equal. Bisexuals are also referred to as “bi”.

Closeted/In the Closet: Refers to individuals that are not out. This is done for many reasons; to keep family, friends, employment, housing, security. Often, LGBTTTIQ people are out in some aspects of their lives and closeted in others. The closet is meant to refer to the feeling of hiding, of being confined, of never fully being able to express yourself. Being in or out is contextually specific, not as hierarchical definition.

Come Out: Coming out is not a single event, but instead, a lifelong process. To declare to oneself and/or publicly affirm one’s sexual or gender identity, sometimes to one person in conversation, sometimes by an act that places one in the public eye. In each new situation, a LGBTTTIQ person must decide whether or not to come out.

Discrimination: For the purpose here, the act of showing partiality or prejudice; a prejudicial act.

Dominant culture: The cultural values, beliefs, and practices that are assumed to be the most common and influential within a given society.

Drag Queen/King: The act of dressing in gendered clothing as part of a performance. Drag Queens perform in highly iconic feminine attire. Drag Kings perform in highly iconic masculine attire. Drag may be performed as a political comment on gender, as parody, or simply as entertainment. Drag performance does not indicate sexuality, gender identity, or sex identity. Often very glamorous or outrageous in appearance.

Dyke: The term was originally used in a negative context to stereotype and oppress lesbians as masculine women. The term has been reclaimed by many (but not all) lesbians as a positive label in describing self-confidence and independence in a woman. E.g.: Dykes on Bikes.

Fag/Faggot: The word faggot originally comes from Latin, meaning a bundle of sticks. Throughout history, when witches were burned this was done with faggots. During the inquisition, the term came to be applied to the bodies of GLBTTTIQ people that were used as kindling

and burned along with witches. Overall, the term fag or faggots is used derogatorily as a slur against gay men, however, many men within the gay community have reclaimed the term as a word of pride and affection towards other gay men.

Family: Colloquial term used to identify other LGBTTTTIQ community members. For example, an LGBTTTTIQ person saying, “that person is family” often means that the person they are referring to is LGBTTTTIQ as well.

Family of choice (chosen family): Persons or group of people an individual sees as significant in his or her life. It may include none, all, or some members of his or her family or origin. In addition, it may include individuals such as significant others, domestic partners, friends, and coworkers.

FTM or F2M: Female-to-Male, refers to someone born female who identifies as male.

Gay: A gay man is a man whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is to other men. “Gay” is also used as an inclusive term encompassing gay men, lesbians, and bisexual people. In the last 20 years, this has become less and less common and “gay” is usually used currently to refer only to gay men. The term is still often used in the broader sense in spoken shorthand, as in “The Gay Pride Parade is at the end of June”.

Gender:

1. A socially constructed system of classification that ascribes qualities of masculinity and femininity to people. Gender characteristics can change over time and are different between cultures. Words that refer to gender include: man, woman, transgender, masculine, feminine, and gender queer.
2. One’s sense of self as masculine or feminine regardless of external genitalia. Gender is often confused with sex. This is inaccurate because sex refers to bodies and gender refers to personality characteristics.

Gender Assignment: Takes place in Euro-American culture universally in infancy; all people are subject to gender assignment. For the intersexed such assignment is perceived to ground and necessitate genital surgery and other medical invasions in infancy. Surgical enforcement of gender assignment is highly controversial.

Gender Blenders, Gender Benders: Individuals who merge the characteristics of both sexes in ways subtle or shocking.

Gender Conformity: When your gender identity and sex “match” (i.e. fit social norms). For example, a male who is masculine and identifies as a man.

Gender Fuck: Is the deliberate flaunting of gender norms with a goal of shocking others.

Gender Identity: One’s initial and psychological sense of oneself as female, male, both or neither. At birth, we are assigned one of two genders, usually based on our visible genitals. For many people this gender assignment fits and feels comfortable. Others do not feel as comfortable in the assigned gender, either because they find the two-gender system too limiting or because they feel more identification with the gender opposite that to which they were assigned at birth. Gender identity does not cause sexual orientation. For example, a masculine woman is not necessarily a lesbian; a feminine man is not necessarily gay.

Gender-neutral: Non-discriminatory language to describe relationships – e.g. “spouse” and “partner” and gender-neutral alternatives to the gender-specific words “husband”, “wife”, “boyfriend”, and “girlfriend”.

Gender Queer (or Genderqueer): A person who redefines or plays with gender, or who refuses gender altogether. A chosen label for people who bend/break the rules of gender and blur the boundaries.

Gender Role: How “masculine” or “feminine” an individual acts. Societies commonly have norms regarding how males and females should behave, expecting people to have personality characteristics and/or act a certain way based on biological sex.

Gender-variant / Gender non-conforming: Displaying gender traits that are not normatively associated with biological sex. “Feminine” behaviour or appearance in a male is gender-variant as is “masculine” behaviour or appearance in a female. Gender-variant behaviour is culturally specific.

GRS: Gender Reassignment Surgery is a misnomer but is used to refer to the ‘sex-change’ operation, sometimes known as SRS (Sexual Reassignment Surgery).

Hate Crime: Hate crime legislation often defines a hate crime as a crime motivated by the actual or perceived race, colour, religion, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation of any person.

Heterosexual: A heterosexual man or woman’s primary sexual and romantic attraction is to people of the other sex. She or he may or may not have had sex with another person, but still realizes that his/her sexual attraction is mainly to people of the other sex. Some people who consider themselves heterosexual have or have had sexual contact with people of the same sex. Heterosexual people are also referred to as “straight”.

Heterosexism: Assuming every person to be heterosexual thereby marginalizing persons who do not identify as heterosexual. Heterosexist beliefs may include the assumption that everyone should be heterosexual; that everyone is heterosexual, unless known to be otherwise; and that non-heterosexuals are unnatural or abnormal. Heterosexism can be overt or covert; and intentional or unintentional. Heterosexism includes the belief that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality and all other sexual orientations. Heterosexism includes the promotion by individuals and /or institutions or the superiority of heterosexuality over same-sex relationships. Like other forms of discrimination, it is often invisible to those who are not its targets. Examples of heterosexism include, are not limited to: name calling, derogatory remarks, exclusion, bias in employment or academic decisions, discrimination in the provision of goods and services, physical and sexual assaults.

Heterosexual Privilege: Benefits derived automatically by being (or being perceived as) heterosexual that are denied to LGBTTTIQ persons.

Homophobia: The irrational fear and intolerance of people who are homosexual or of homosexual feelings within one’s self. This assumes that heterosexuality is superior.

Homosexual: A homosexual man or woman’s primary sexual and romantic attraction is to people of the same sex. She or he may or may not have had sex with another person, but still realizes that his/her sexual attraction is mainly to people of the same sex. Some people who consider themselves homosexual have or have had sexual contact with people of the opposite sex.

The term “homosexual” was first coined in the 1800’s in Central Europe to differentiate those who participated in same-gender sexual activity from those who participated in opposite-gender sexual activity, and over the years has been associated with sin, deviance, criminal behaviour, uncleanness, and mental illness – all of which serve to place lesbians and gay men in the subordinate role of being categorized as societally deviant individuals who are marginalized by mainstream society.

Although “homosexuality” was removed from the DSM in 1973 as a specific mental illness, it was not until 1987, with the publication of the DSM-III-R, that all references to lesbian/gay/bisexual (LGB) sexual orientation were removed.

Institutional Oppression (or Systemic Oppression): Arrangement of a society used to benefit one group at the expense of another through the use of language, media education, religion, economics, etc.

Internalized Oppression: The process by which an oppressed person comes to believe, accept, or live out the inaccurate stereotypes and misinformation about their group.

Intersexed: A medical diagnosis that describes a person who is born with physical and/or chromosomal features in which sex characteristics usually considered to belong to distinctly male or female bodies are combined in a single body. Intersexed persons are often subjected to surgical intervention at birth (with or without parental knowledge or consent). The term intersexed is often encompassed under ‘transgendered’. However, while there are some areas of overlap with intersexed and transgendered issues, there are also many areas of distinction.

Invisible Minority: A group whose minority status is not always immediately visible, such as some disabled people and LGBTTTTIQ people. This lack of visibility may make organizing for rights difficult.

Lesbian: A lesbian is a woman whose primary sexual and romantic attractions are to other women. “Lesbian” is one of the oldest and most positive terms for gay women. Derived from the Greek Isle of Lesbos where the lesbian poet, Sappho, had a school in 400 B.C.

LGBTTTTIQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Two-Spirited, Intersexed and Queer.

Marginalized: Excluded, ignored, or relegated to the outer edge of a group/society/community.

Men who have sex with men (MSM): Men who engage in same-sex behaviour but who may not necessarily self-identify as gay.

MTF or M2F: Male-to-Female, refers to someone born male who identifies as female.

Non-Op: Short for Non-Operative, refers to someone who for medical reasons or personal choice does not plan to undergo GRS.

Outing: The public exposure of someone’s sexuality without their knowledge or permission. May be accidental (unaware that person does not wish their sexuality to be known), or intentional (a form of harassment).

Pansexual: A term of choice for people who do not self-identify as bisexual, finding themselves attracted to people across a spectrum of genders.

Passing: Being taken as one’s preferred gender without question or incident by others.

Pre-Op: Short for Pre-Operative, refers to someone who has not yet had GRS, but who intends to undergo such surgery.

Post-Op: Short for Post-Operative, refers to someone who has undergone GRS.

Queer:

1. A political statement, as well as a sexual orientation, which advocates breaking binary thinking and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as potentially fluid. Many of those who use the term feel it is more inclusive, allowing for the diversity of race, class, ability and gender that is represented by the LGBTTTIQ communities.
2. A simple label to explain a complex set of sexual behaviours and desires. For example, a person who is attracted to multiple genders may identify as queer.
3. Used by some to refer to themselves, the LGBTTTIQ community, a person who is LG-BTTTIQ, or even someone who is supportive of the LGBTTTIQ communities.
4. Often viewed as a political statement as well as an identity or label.

Sex: refers to a person based on their anatomy (external genitalia, chromosomes, and internal reproductive system). Sex terms are male, female, transsexual, and intersexed. Sex is biological, although social views and experiences of sex are cultural.

Sex identity: The sex that a person sees themselves as. This can include refusing to label oneself with a sex.

Sexual Identity and Gender Identity: are different issues. A gay man may or may not be masculine. Being a lesbian does not dictate a woman's femininity. Similarly, a transgendered person may be gay, straight or bisexual.

Sexual Minority:

1. Refers to members of sexual orientations/identities or who engage in sexual activities that are not part of the mainstream.
2. Refers to members of sex groups that do not fall into the majority categories of male or female, such as intersexuals and transsexuals.

Sexual Orientation: Sexual orientation refers to one's sexual and romantic attraction. Sexual orientation is not necessarily the same as sexual behaviour.

Stereotype: An exaggerated oversimplified belief about an entire group of people without regard in individual differences.

Straight: Person who is attracted to the opposite sex and identifies as heterosexual.

Transgendered (TG), Trans, or trans-identified: A person who identifies with a gender identity other than the one that was ascribed to their biological sex at birth; or a person who views their gender as more fluid than the strictly male or female gender categories allows. Transgendered people may identify as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.

Transgender:

1. Transgender (sometimes shortened to trans or TG) people are those whose psychological self ("gender identity") differs from the social expectations for the physical sex they were born with. To understand this, one must understand the difference between biological sex,

which is one's body (genitals, chromosomes, etc.), and social gender, which refers to levels of masculinity and femininity. Often, society conflates sex and gender, viewing them as the same thing. But, gender and sex are not the same thing. Transgender people are those whose psychological self ("gender identity") differs from the social expectations for the physical sex they were born with. For example, a female with a masculine gender identity or who identifies as a man.

2. An umbrella term for transsexuals, cross-dressers (transvestites), transgenderists, gender queers, and people who identify as neither female nor male and/or as neither a man or as a woman. Transgender is not a sexual orientation; transgender people may have any sexual orientation. It is important to acknowledge that while some people may fit under this definition of transgender, they may not identify as such.

Transition: The act of switching genders. In most cases, transition precedes SRS. Many TG people live part-time in their preferred gender role prior to transitioning to full time.

Transphobic: Fear or hatred of transgender people; transphobia is manifested in a number of ways, including violence, harassment and discrimination.

Transsexual: A person who identifies with and lives as a gender different ("opposite") from the one typically assigned to their sex at birth. Transsexual persons usually undergo gender transition with or without surgical hormonal intervention. Also known as male-to-female, MTF, female-to-male, FTM, transwomen, and transmen.

Transvestite/Cross Dresser: Individuals who regularly or occasionally wear the clothing socially assigned to a gender not their own, but are usually comfortable with their anatomy and do not wish to change it (i.e. they are not transsexuals). Cross-dresser is the preferred term for men who enjoy or prefer women's clothing and social roles. Contrary to popular belief, the overwhelming majority of male cross-dressers identify as straight and often are married. Very few women call themselves cross-dressers.

Two-spirited: Two-spirited is a term adopted by some contemporary North American Aboriginal peoples to refer to those who embody both the male and female spirit. The term is inclusive and can refer to both sexual orientation and/or gender identity or expression. Therefore, lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and heterosexual trans-people may all refer to themselves as two-spirited. Terms such as "berdache" have a colonial origin; and "gay" and "lesbian" are, to many people, Eurocentric and culturally irrelevant to Aboriginal two-spirited people.

Zie: Gender neutral pronouns that can be used instead of he/she.

Zir: Gender neutral pronouns that can be used instead of his/her.