Transgender Health Needs in Simcoe Muskoka

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Acknowledgement

In March of 2016, the Gilbert Centre was awarded a contract by Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital to examine the health needs of transgender people and families in the Simcoe Muskoka region.   This project, funded by the North Simcoe Muskoka LHIN, was to:

- explore the experiences of transgender people accessing health in the region through community consultations and an online survey,
- examine accessibility to health and social services for transgender people through an organization environmental scan,
- review current literature on best practices in the provision of healthcare to people who are transgender.

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Trans Inclusivity

In 2017, as part of a larger study, the Gilbert Centre — in partnership with Laurentian University and Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital — conducted a trans inclusivity and accessibility environmental scan of health and social service organizations in Simcoe Muskoka.

Perception of Inclusivity

Ninety-seven percent of the organizations surveyed were confident in their ability to deliver trans inclusive services. This contradicts other findings from this study, such as the lack of training, reports of minimal visual representation of the trans community, and only a few organizations having implemented policies or procedures that specifically include trans individuals and their families.

To be inclusive, organizations need to consider the specific needs of the community (often provided through training and experience), how policies and procedures address the community, and how the community is represented within the physical space.[1]

97%

Visual Representation

16%

5 of 31 organizations have visual representation of trans community available to staff and service users, while 22 said they use visual material but none of it includes trans representation

Staff Training

26%

8 of the 31 organizations surveyed reported that all of their staff had received training with regard to the needs of the trans individuals and their families

Policies and Procedures

19%

6 of 31 organizations have some form of trans acknowledgement in at least one of the following policies or procedures: Code of Conduct, Harassment and Discrimination, Confidentiality or Dress Code

[1] Diller, J. V. (2015). Cultural diversity: A primer for the human services (5th ed.). Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning.

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Environmental Scan of Trans Inclusive Support Services in

Simcoe County and Muskoka District

It is estimated that 1 in 200 people identify as trans[1] (Scheim & Bauer, 2015), yet this is a population that has only recently begun to be taken seriously by mainstream culture. People who identify as part of the trans community[2] often face adversity as a result of their gender identity, adversity that takes many forms in a variety of settings (Bradford, Reisner, Honnold, Xavier, 2013; Lawrie, 2017). However, very little is known about the experiences of the local trans community in Simcoe Muskoka. As part of a larger study focusing on the experiences of local trans individuals and their families, the Gilbert Centre — in partnership with Laurentian University and Orillia Soldier's Memorial Hospital — conducted an environmental scan of health and social service organizations in Simcoe County and Muskoka District, in Ontario Canada. The focus of the environmental scan was to determine how inclusive local service providers are to this growing population of service users. The following is a report of this project.

Methodology

In order to conduct a scan of local organizations, an online survey was created. This survey was informed by the Trans Pulse Survey (Trans Pulse, 2009), work by Cross regarding the Cultural Competence Continuum (Diller, 2015), and the Gay Affirmative Practice Scale (Crisp, 2006) and aimed to measure an organization's level of inclusiveness to the trans community. The questions focused on the organization's perception of their own inclusiveness, their awareness of trans staff and service users, structural factors that specifically acknowledge the trans community and their needs, and the use of/need for additional training. For a more detailed description of the questions used, see Appendix A.

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[1] For the purposes of this study, trans is defined as an umbrella term for people whose personal gender identity is not compatible with the gender they were assigned at birth. Some identities that may fall under the trans umbrella include transgender, transsexual, drag queens, drag kings, cross-dressers, intersex, non-binary, two spirit, gender variant, genderqueer, gender diverse, and more.

[2] Trans community refers to a collective of people who identify under the umbrella term of trans, and those close to those individuals, which may include family and/or friends, but is not limited to such. The use of this term is not intended to imply homogeneity among this group, but is used for the sake of simplicity.

Once the survey was complete, over 115 organizations within the Simcoe County and Muskoka District were identified and contacted. The organizations identified provide a variety of supports and services that are available to the trans community, but are not necessarily trans specific, including: counselling services, medical services, programs for people with limited financial resources (such as food banks, homeless shelters, etc), educational upgrading opportunities, and employment services, etc. Given the large geographic area, an attempt was made to engage organizations from a variety of towns and communities; however, given the lack of available resources in smaller communities, the majority of organizations identified were located in Barrie Ontario. Invitations to participate were sent out electronically through established coalitions, through direct emails to program coordinators and executive directors, and by phone. Again, because of the large geographic area, some larger organizations had separate operations in several towns or communities within this area, each of which received an invitation. The online survey was open from December 2016 to March 2017.

By the end of March 2017, 38 participants had begun the survey, seven of which were excluded for failing to complete a minimum of 75% of the survey. The organizations included in this study were categorized based on the type of service delivered. Of the 31 participants, 13 were social support services, five offered medical services, and five offered a combination of social support and medical services. The remaining eight were classified as other, and included: employment services, education services, and a detention center.

Results

Of the 31 organizations surveyed, 20 perceive themselves to be inclusive to trans communities at all times and in all ways, 10 perceive themselves to be inclusive to trans communities most of the time and in most ways, and one did not report how inclusive they were to the trans community. Five agencies reported that their programs have gender specific restrictions, including services for male youth and services for female survivors of sexual and/or domestic violence. Two of the organizations acknowledged having had to refuse a trans service user because they did not feel capable of providing adequate care; one of these agencies was able to provide a community-based referral for the issue presented, while the other was not. In terms of awareness, 17 organizations reported being aware of service users who identified as trans, and five reported being aware trans staff or volunteers.

Regarding structural forms of trans inclusion, less than 20% of 31 organizations had implemented policies and procedures that specifically acknowledged trans individuals and their families. It is important to note that how these organizations specifically acknowledge trans individuals within these policies is unclear. The most common policies and procedures that acknowledge the trans community were: Code of Conduct (n=6), followed by Harassment and Discrimination (n=5), and Confidentiality (n=5). One organization reported that their Dresscode policy included trans specific acknowledgement, and one reported that their intake procedure acknowledged and made specific accommodations for trans individuals as required. When agencies were asked how they captured gender on staff and volunteer forms, six reported they allow people to choose between male and female; 11 allow people to choose between male, female, and trans/other; while seven provide a blank space for people to write in their own gender expression.

Another structural component the environmental scan considered, was training. Out of 31 organizations, over 19 reported that at least some of their staff or volunteers had received some form of training regarding the specific needs of the trans community. Yet only 25.8% reported that all of their staff had received training, and a further 6.4% reported that some of their volunteers had received training regarding the needs specific to the trans community. Twenty organizations reported they felt there was a need within their agency regarding the specific needs of trans individuals and their families, while 11 reported there was no need. Finally, five of 31 organizations have visual representation of trans individuals and their families available to staff and service users, two reported not using visual material, and 22 reported they use visual material but none of it includes trans representation. For a breakdown of this information, see Table 1.

Comparing those who reported they were inclusive to the trans community at all times and in all ways [ATAW] to those who reported they were inclusive to the trans community most of the time and in most ways [MTMW], those who felt more confident were: slightly more likely to also report that they had implemented policies and procedures with specific acknowledgement of the trans community; reported a greater percentage of all of their staff were trained regarding the specific needs of the trans community; and were less likely to report that their programs had gender restrictions. Interestingly, they were also the only group to report that they had turned

away a trans service user because they did not feel adequately equipped to deal with their needs. While there were differences between these two categories, it should be cautioned that the differences were often marginal. The only category in which there was a large discrepancy was regarding visual representation. The only organizations to provide visual material representing trans individuals and their families were those who reported being inclusive to this community at all times and in all ways. For a breakdown of this information, see Table 1.

Table 1: Compares all organizations with those who see themselves as inclusive to the trans community ATAW and those who perceive themselves to be inclusive to the trans community MTMW	All (n=31)	ATAW (n=20)	MTMW (n=10)
Social support focused organizations	13 (41.9%)	10 (50%)	3 (30%)
Medical support focused organizations	5 (16.1%)	4 (20%)	1 (10%)
Organizations that provide both medical and social support based services	5 (16.1%)	2 (10%)	3 (30%)
Other organizations (including employment services, education services, and detention centers)	8 (25.8%)	4 (20%)	3 (30%)
Have program specific gender restrictions	5 (16.1%)	2 (10%)	2 (20%)
Provide at least 1 gender neutral washroom	23 (74.2%)	15 (75%)	7 (70%)
Provide services specific to the trans community	4 (12.9%)	3 (15%)	1 (10%)
Capture gender as male or female	6 (19.4%)	4 (20%)	2 (20%)
Capture gender as male, female, trans/other	11 (34.5%)	6 (30%)	5 (50%)
Capture gender using a list with several options beyond male, female, trans/other	1 (3.2%)	1 (5%)	0
Capture gender through the use of a blank space	7 (22.6%)	6 (30%)	1 (10%)
Do not use forms to capture gender	5 (16.1%)	3 (15%)	2 (20%)
Have had to turn away trans service users because they did not feel qualified to deal with their needs directly	2 (6.5%)	2 (10%)	0
Currently have established policies and/or procedures that specifically acknowledge the trans community	6 (19.4%)	5 (25%)	1 (10%)
• Code of Conduct	6 (19.4%)	4 (20%)	1 (10%)
• Confidentiality	5 (16.1%)	4 (20%)	1 (10%)
• Harassment and Discrimination	5 (16.1%)	3 (15%)	1 (10%)
• Dresscode	1 (3.2%)	1 (5%)	0
• Other	2 (6.5%)	2 (10%)	0
At least one service provider in the agency has been given specific training around the needs of the trans community	19 (61.3%)	13 (65%)	6 (60%)
• All staff have received training	8 (25.8%)	6 (30%)	2 (20%)
• Some staff have received training	11 (34.5%)	7 (35%)	4 (40%)
• All volunteers have received training	0	0	0
• Some volunteers have received training	2 (6.5%)	1 (5%)	1 (10%)
Report need for training regarding the trans community	20 (64.5%)	12 (60%)	7 (70%)
Has some form of visual representations (posters, pamphlets, promotional materials, etc.) available to service users that specifically acknowledges/addresses the trans community	5 (16.1%)	5 (25%)	0

Discussion

This environmental scan has demonstrated both the positive work that is being done in this area locally, as well as potential areas of improvement. For example, over 74% of those surveyed reported that their organizations include gender-neutral washrooms. It is not known if this was done for the specific purpose of providing an inclusive environment for the trans community. However, given the contested nature of trans individuals in gendered washrooms (Glese, 2017), and the violence they are often subjected to in these spaces (Herman, 2013), gender-neutral washrooms may provide the trans community with a greater sense of physical and emotional safety when in these organizations (Jonah, 2016). Having a gender neutral washroom may be perceived as adding to the overall inclusiveness and accessibility of these organizations for trans individuals and their families.

While these organizations provide gender neutral washrooms, however, there is no way to know how this is defined within each organization. This is important to consider as there are several forms of multi-stall and single-stall washrooms that are considered gendered neutral. For example, wheelchair accessible washrooms, family washrooms, and multi-stall washrooms with signage indicating a toilet, are all gender-neutral washrooms. When the only gender-neutral washroom an organization offers is designated a wheelchair accessible or family washroom, trans individuals may face stigma around their right to access these spaces, as they have been intended for other groups, or may act to segregate the trans community (Jonah, 2016; Raypole, 2016). While having any form of gender-neutral washroom provides more accessibility to the trans community than not having any, it is important to reflect on all the implications that come along with these contested spaces in order to reduce barriers to inclusivity.

Another aspect of trans inclusive work being done in the community includes how gender is conceptualized within these organizations. This was demonstrated through forms that require staff and volunteers to state their gender. Of those who participated in the survey, over 60% capture gender in a way that went beyond the binary perspective of male or female. This included adding trans or other (34.5%) in addition to male and female, which expands the conception of gender by acknowledging a third option. Others reported that they attempt to capture the complexity of gender as a multifaceted and complex social construct by providing a variety of options to choose from, or by allowing the service user to write in their own gender identity as they perceive it. These attempts to capture gender acknowledge — to varying degrees — the existence of the trans community, and may act to increase the organizations' accessibility and inclusivity to this group. Organizations that attempt to capture gender as a binary (only male or female) may inadvertently perpetuate transphobia through the erasure of their trans identity or the identity of their family members.

Training is another area of focus in which organizations are working towards creating inclusive environments for the trans community. While capturing the specifics of the training — such as when the training was completed, the style, and the proposed efficacy, etc. — was

beyond the scope of this study, the acknowledgment of the need for training demonstrates that trans inclusion is being considered to some extent. This was evidenced by over 61% of the participants who reported that at least one person on their staff had undergone training with regard to the needs of the trans individuals and their families. Additionally, eight organizations reported that all of their paid staff had received such training. When asked if they felt their organization was in need of training (regardless of whether or not they had previously received any), over 60% reported that yes, there is currently a need for training within their organization. This may be due to just over half of the organizations stating they are aware of trans service users that access their organization, and the desire to understand and meet their specific needs.

Interestingly, eleven organizations felt that their organizations were not in need of trans specific training. While these organizations generally demonstrated a greater level of inclusion than those who did feel there was a need for training, over 25% had not received any form of training in this area, and less than 30% had policies or procedures that specifically acknowledge trans individuals and their families. For a more complete comparison of difference between those who acknowledge a need for training and those who did not, please see Table 2.

Almost all of the organizations were confident in their ability to deliver trans inclusive services. As discussed above, all except for one organization (who declined to answer) reported that they felt always or mostly trans inclusive. This is interesting given other findings in this study, including: that some organizations are still using a male/female binary to capture gender, that the majority of organizations do not have policies or procedures that specifically include trans individuals and their families, and that only five of the 31 organizations provide visual representation of trans individuals and their families to their service users.

The final section of the survey offered participants the opportunity to provide any additional thoughts, concerns, or questions that arose for them while taking the survey. Several participants reported they were inclusive simply because they did not treat anyone in the community differently than anyone else: "[this service] is for people not for genders, and there should therefore be no discrimination [regarding] gender". Another said "[their agency] accepts anyone, regardless of gender, age, nationality, religion or any other identifier". Unfortunately, as noted earlier, the trans community often faces a greater level of adversity than other marginalized communities. By not acknowledging the specific needs of this group, — such as the choice to use names and pronouns that may or may not be recognized legally, the difficulty in obtaining housing and/or employment due to their gender identity, or support services that do not treat their trans identity as a disorder, etc. — organizations may inadvertently create barriers to service, even though they are trying to help (Diller, 2015). To overcome this, organizations must be willing to acknowledge the barriers that exist for trans individuals and their families in the services they are providing, and consciously work towards addressing them, an often exhausting and ongoing process (Mulally, 2010). While this study has demonstrated some of the work being done locally regarding trans inclusion, it is imperative not to lose sight of the work that remains.

Limitations

The results of this study are not meant to be generalizable, only to explore how inclusive a sampling of organizations in Simcoe County and Muskoka District are to the trans community. The majority of participants have some connection to the Gilbert Centre — the lead researcher of this study, and one of the only providers of trans inclusive training in Simcoe County and Muskoka. Therefore, it is expected that the results are positively skewed towards an increased knowledge of the trans community and the need for greater inclusion that would likely not be present in a random sampling of agencies in this area.

Table 2: Comparing organizations that feel their agency needs training to those who do not	Training Needed (n=20)	No Training Needed/ Declined to Answer (n=11)
Have program specific gender restrictions	4 (20%)	1 (9.1%)
Provide at least 1 gender neutral washroom	13 (65%)	10 (90.9%)
Provide services specific to the trans community	2 (10%)	2 (18.2%)
Capture gender as male or female	4 (20%)	2 (18.2%)
Capture gender as male, female, trans/other	7 (35%)	4 (36.4%)
Capture gender using a list with several options beyond male, female, trans/other	1 (5%)	0
Capture gender through the use of a blank space	6 (30%)	1 (9.1%)
Do not use forms to capture gender	1 (5%)	4 (36.4%)
Have had to turn away trans service users because they did not feel qualified to deal with their needs directly	2 (10%)	0
Currently have established policies and/or procedures that specifically acknowledge the trans community	3 (15%)	3 (27.3%)
• Code of Conduct	3 (15%)	3 (27.3%)
• Confidentiality	3 (15%)	2 (18.2%)
• Harassment and Discrimination	3 (15%)	2 (18.2%)
• Dresscode	1 (5%)	0
• Other	1 (5%)	1 (9.1%)
At least one service provider in the agency has been given specific training around the needs of the trans community	11 (55%)	8 (72.7%)
• All staff have received training	5 (25%)	3 (27.3%)
• Some staff have received training	6 (30%)	5 (45.5%)
• All volunteers have received training	0	0
• Some volunteers have received training	0	2 (18.2%)
Has some form of visual representations (posters, pamphlets, promotional materials, etc.) available to service users that specifically acknowledges/addresses the trans community	3 (15%)	2 (18.2%)
Perceives themselves to be inclusive to the trans community at all times and in all ways	11 (55%)	8 (72.7%)
Perceives themselves to be inclusive to the trans community most of the time and in most ways	8 (40%)	3 (27.3%)

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. Name of Organization
2. How would you categorize the types of services offered by your agency (please check all that apply):
   a. Health care
   b. Legal
   c. Social service
   d. Other (please list all that apply)
3. Please provide a brief description of the services your agency offers
4. Are there any age restrictions regarding who can access your services?
5. Please briefly explain the age restrictions regarding who can access your services
6. Are there any gender restrictions regarding who can access your services?
7. Please briefly explain the gender restrictions regarding who can access your services
8. In what languages are you currently offering services?
9. What is your current catchment area?
10. Are you able to accommodate people outside of your catchment area if no similar services are provided in their area?
11. Do you charge for the services you provide?
12. What options do you provide services users to pay for services?
13. Do you consider yourself to be inclusive to the trans community?
    a. Yes, all the time/in all ways
    b. Most of the time/in most ways
    c. Sometimes/in some ways
    d. Rarely/in few ways
    e. No, not at all
14. To the best of your knowledge, are any of your current service users part of the trans community?
15. To the best of your knowledge, are any of the people on staff or any volunteers part of the trans community?
16. Do you have a gender-neutral washroom? (A gender neutral washroom is a washroom that people of any gender or gender identity may use)

17. Do you provide any specific services for the trans community?

18. Please list and provide a brief description of any specific services you offer to the trans community?

19. On forms (for both service users and employees/volunteers) how do you capture gender?

    a. As either male or female

    b. As either male, female, other/trans/etc

    c. You provide various gender identities beyond male/female/other, that the individual can choose from

    d. You provide a space for the individual to identify themselves

    e. Not applicable/do not require paperwork that asks for service users/employees/volunteers to disclose their sex/gender

20. Have you ever had to turn away anyone from trans community because you did not feel qualified/ were not able to deal with them directly?

21. When you had to turn someone away from the trans community because you did not feel qualified/ were not able to deal with them directly, were you able to provide the person a referral to another agency?

22. Do any of your staff/volunteer policies and procedures address trans/gender-nonconforming people specifically?

23. Which of your policies/procedures address trans/gender-nonconforming specifically?

    a. Code of Conduct for staff/volunteers

    b. Harassment and/or Discrimination

    c. Confidentiality

    d. Dress Code

    e. Other (please list all that apply)

24. Have service providers in your agency been given specific training around the needs of the trans community?

25. Which of the following services providers have been given training on the needs of the trans community? (Please select all that apply)

    a. All staff Some staff

    b. All volunteers

    c. Some volunteers

    d.   Other (please specify)

26. Do you feel there is a need for specific training around the needs of the trans community within your agency?

27. Are you aware of a "community of practice" of service providers in your area (by that we mean the health professionals serving trans communities getting together to exchange referrals, knowledge, support)?

28. Is your organization part of a trans specific affiliation/collaboration/partnership?

29. Please list all trans community related affiliations/collaborations/partners with which your organization is involved.

30. Do you have any visual representations (posters, pamphlets, promotional materials, etc.) available to service users that specifically acknowledge/address the trans community?

31. Do you provide specific services to gender-independent/gender-nonconforming children or adolescents? Yes No

32. 32. List and briefly describe the specific services your agency provides to gender-independent/gender nonconforming children or adolescents?

33. Are you aware of any other service providers in your community that provide specific services to gender-independent/gender-nonconforming children or adolescents?

34. Please list any other service providers in your community that provide specific services to gender-independent/gender-nonconforming children or adolescence

35. Do you have any final comments, questions, or concerns?