#HamOnt LGBTQ+ SPEAK OUT!

Making Hamilton a Queer and Trans Positive City

5 community meetings resulted in almost 150 voices of lived experience

- **community**
  Finding other LGBTQ families is hard. There are no events for LGBTQ families to get together; find each other.
  Where is our community?

- **education**
  How do you get an education when you have to educate everyone around you?

- **support service**
  I was shocked at the lack of resources in Hamilton considering the diversity of the community.

- **health care**
  We shouldn't have to be afraid to go to the hospital when we need to.

- **housing**
  We should have an LGBTQ shelter for youth. That would be great. If your parents kicked you out, it could be a safe place to go and feel comfortable.

- **recreation**
  Gender neutral bathrooms can open a lot of doors for making public spaces feel safe.

SPRC
SOCIAL PLANNING 
& RESEARCH COUNCIL
OF HAMILTON

CREATING COMMUNITY CHANGE

SUMMER 2016
Creating safe public spaces and also taking a public space that's already there and making it safe and inclusive

Just over 50 years ago, then Justice Minister Pierre Trudeau proposed a set of amendments to Canada’s Criminal Code that would chart a revolutionary course in making this country one of the most progressive in the world when it comes to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people.

“Take this thing on homosexuality,” he started. “I think the view we take here is that there’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation,” he continued, paving the way for the decriminalization of the associated acts of “buggery” and “gross indecency” in 1969. In 1977, Quebec became the 2nd jurisdiction in the world to add sexual orientation to its human rights code, with Denmark starting the list back in 1933. It would take until 1996 for Canada to follow suit and until 2005 for this country to become the fourth in line to recognize same sex marriages.

Hamilton has its own history of trying to become a more inclusive and safe city for LGBTQ+ people.

In the 1970s, a ‘gay’ phone line could connect one to the Hamilton-McMaster Homophile Association which was linked to the Gay Women of Hamilton and other support groups that were slowly forming. The McMaster Gay Liberation Movement hosted various events and speakers to help raise awareness, including some of Canada’s most influential queer activists.

Today the well-established Queer Student Community Centre at Mac provides a contact point for LGBTQ+ students and their allies and advocates for “a safe and supportive campus, absent of homophobia and transphobia, where the expression of one’s gender and sexual identity is welcomed and respected.” And yet homo- and transphobic incidents continue to be reported by students.

In the broader community the conversation has not always been easy. The first celebration of Pride in 1991 resulted in an Ontario Human Rights complaint when The Gay and Lesbian Alliance of Hamilton requested an official recognition from the city and was turned down. A subsequent decision resulted in a $5,000 fine against the mayor of the city who also was ordered to proclaim Pride week in 1995.

Now the City has an LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee to the Mayor and Council and not only is the rainbow flag raised every year at the start of Pride week, this year the Trans flag was raised as well despite another recent human rights case involving a trans woman being refused entry to the washroom of her choice.

Relations between the LGBTQ+ community and the local police service, like that in many of Canada’s large cities, has also been a struggle. In 1997, the GLBT Police Task Force was struck in reaction to Project Rosebud, an undercover operation at the Royal Botanical Gardens that led to police arrests of 20 gay men and the publication of their names and addresses in the Hamilton Spectator.

While the task force is not currently active, community engagement is happening in other ways. The creation of an Internal Support Network for LGBTQ+ police and raising the Pride flag for the first time in 2015 have shown some important movement at Hamilton Police Services, accompanied with recognition from both within and without that more needs to be done.

Flags are not enough!

While many organizations in Hamilton have worked hard over the last decade to increase the visibility of their organizations as LGBTQ+ positive since the last needs assessment was completed, it is time to deepen that pursuit with solid changes in policies and practices impacting queer and trans people in all their diversity.

The #HamOnt LGBTQ Speak Out community consultations held in February and March, 2016, were organized by a committee of individuals and organizational representatives and set out to provide an update to the original Needs Assessment from 2008 by the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC) in partnership with the now defunct Hamilton Pride Festival Inc.

Though funding for this current project did not provide for the robust set of consultations needed for a city of this size, five community meetings resulted in almost 150 voices of lived experience in the LGBTQ+ community of communities and ally service providers. The meetings focused on the voices of the trans community, LGBTQ+ youth, LGBTQ+ older adults, LGBTQ+ Parents or the Parents of LGBTQ+ children, and one meeting that was a general focus and open to all.

Future research considerations would include conversations with people who identify as bisexual, lesbian, gay, MSM (men who have sex with men), and with LGBTQ+ people who are [d]isabled, people of colour, newcomers/refugees, rurally located and others as identified by a community research committee.

Each community consultation followed the same framework starting with a guest speaker(s) from the focus population setting the tone for reflection with opening remarks. Next, participants were asked to answer the following questions on their own, writing them on sticky notes and posting them to the Pride and Trans flag banners: What makes Hamilton a great place for LGBTQ+ people to live, work, learn and play?

What are the gaps in making Hamilton a great place for LGBTQ+ people to live, work, learn and play?

Finally, group conversations were led by a facilitator while participants discussed what is working and what is not working for LGBTQ+ people when it comes to healthcare, education, housing, recreation, social service supports, and community.

The results of those conversations have been compiled into the following recommendations meant to be a guide for the next steps the City of Hamilton, other public institutions and flagships employers need to take in order to make this city an inclusive and safe space for LGBTQ+ people to live, work, learn and play.
Forms aren’t reflective of all the ways that families can look

LGBTQ+ Positive Community Space

Organizational Changes

Training and Education

Despite perceptible shifts in the social landscape of Hamilton, resources and spaces dedicated to the LGBTQ+ community remain few and far between. A clear and consistent theme throughout this consultation process was the need for an LGBTQ+ community centre. Further, the need to create greater safety and inclusion for LGBTQ+ people in all community/public spaces was distinctly articulated.

Therefore it is recommended:

1.1 The City of Hamilton, in partnership with community and corporate partners, conduct a feasibility study to assess the viability of an LGBTQ+ specific community hub that would offer a broad range of community-identified resources, supports, services and social opportunities.

This hub would include: one stop access; accessible/finish work structure; an alcohol-free space; volunteer and peer mentorship opportunities; support services including group and individual counselling for specific populations (e.g., trans youth, older adults, newcomers/refugees, PFLAG, gay men/MSM, people who are [dis]abled and social opportunities (e.g., movie nights, book clubs, drop-in times, art programs, exercise opportunities).

1.2 LGBTQ+-related information such as health services and supports should be centralized and made available through a website, phone line, and/or printed resources that provide consistent, up-to-date information about services, programs and events for the LGBTQ+ community in Hamilton and beyond. Consideration for issues of culture, language and accessibility should be central in the development of these resources.

1.3 The City of Hamilton and other publicly funded organizations must undertake LGBTQ+ Positive Space organizational assessments of their spaces and services accessed by the general population and make necessary changes to provide inclusive and safe space.

Organizational culture (not-for-profit, public services and private sector) too often reflect a dominant social culture that discriminates against LGBTQ+ people. LGBTQ+ people, and particularly those with complex, intersecting experiences of oppression, will continue to be marginalized and to feel unsafe and unwelcome until concrete action is taken to change organizational norms, policies, practices and physical spaces that perpetuate exclusion.

Therefore it is recommended:

2.1 Institutions, agencies and businesses will commit to creating equity-based, transformational organizational change. This requires a progressive assessment of the workplace with regard to LGBTQ+ inclusiveness and a commitment to designating the resources (both human and financial) necessary to effect change.

2.2 Gender neutral washrooms and change rooms be adopted as the standard of best practice with public institutions and flagships employers leading the way.

2.3 Standardized forms and procedures be regularly vetted to ensure they do not exclude or misidentify people based on heteronormative, cisgender assumptions.

2.4 Organizational mission and values clearly reflect a commitment to inclusion and equity for all.

2.5 Human Resources policies and practices are reviewed with intentionality toward creating more LGBTQ+ inclusive workplaces in Hamilton. Ability and commitment to contributing to an anti-oppressive work environment should be identified as a core competency.

2.6 Organizations must diversify their leadership teams to reflect the communities they serve, in particular ensuring queer and trans people have voices in decision-making processes (e.g., staff and volunteer teams, planning tables, community committees, boards of directors, advisory groups).

Professional and para-professional service providers cannot adequately respond to the needs of LGBTQ+ people without developing insight into the lived experiences of those they serve.

LGBTQ+ workers frequently experience exclusion, inequality and violence in the workplace.

Social isolation, discrimination and violence continue to be experienced and under-reported by LGBTQ+ children and youth and those with LGBTQ+ parents.

Therefore it is recommended:

3.1 Public services and flagship employers make equity for LGBTQ+ people a strategic priority and designate the resources required to assess their service/employment environments and provide ongoing Positive Space Training for their workers.

3.2 Positive Space Training should include an increased focus on trans issues and address the ways in which other identities/social locations (e.g. race, income, age) intersect with queer and/or trans identities.

3.3 Post secondary institutions review and update course curricula to equitably include LGBTQ+ relevant content.

3.4 An anti-oppression framework and equity and inclusion issues specific to LGBTQ+ people be prioritized in the education and on-going professional development of local healthcare professionals, 1st responders (paramedics, police, fire), teachers, early childhood educators, social workers and others working with people in vulnerable circumstances.

3.5 The HWDSB and the HWCDSB ensures that each secondary school has a well-resourced LGBTQ+ Positive Space Group following current best practices.

3.6 The HWDSB and the HWCDSB provide mandatory LGBTQ+ Positive Space Training to all faculty and staff, starting with those who provide guidance counselling and administer positive space groups. This training must reinforce provincial anti-bullying policies and encourage practices that interrupt discriminatory speech and behaviours experienced by LGBTQ+ children, youth and those with LGBTQ+ parents.

**Cisgender/Cissexual** - A person who is not trans: whose gender identity, behaviours and appearance are in harmony with what their culture expects from a person with their external sex characteristics.

**Trans** - An umbrella term for a person whose gender identity does not match society's expectations of someone with their physical sex characteristics.
Finding **other LGBTQ families** is hard. There are no events for LGBTQ families to get together, find each other. **Where is our community?**

**Physical, Sexual, and Mental Health Services**

LGBTQ+ people need local access to physical, sexual, and mental health resources that are informed, accurate, and relevant to the diverse needs of the community. Currently, queer and trans people are rarely able to find knowledgeable and respectful services for their physical, mental health needs. Sexual health and family planning services are often ill-prepared to provide accurate information, treatment, and testing for LGBTQ+ people. There is also an acute need for LGBTQ+-specific counselling in the city. While both individual and group support are necessary, individual counselling options are especially important at this time.

**Therefore it is recommended:**

4.1 Health care providers (e.g. Hamilton Health Sciences, St. Joseph's Health Care, Community Health Centres, Family Health Teams, walk-in clinics) undertake or re-visit an LGBTQ+ Positive Space organizational assessment and make necessary changes to provide inclusive and safe space.

4.2 Sexual health care and family planning services (e.g. City of Hamilton - Public Health, Community Health Centres, midwifery services, fertility clinics) undertake or re-visit an LGBTQ+ Positive Space organizational assessment and make necessary changes to provide inclusive and safe space.

4.3 Services for aging people, (e.g. public and private long-term care facilities, Community Care Access Centre, Assisted Living programs, recreational day programs, palliative/hospice services), undertake or re-visit an LGBTQ+ Positive Space organizational assessment and make the necessary changes to provide inclusive and positive space. Further, such organizations commit to making positive space training a core educational requirement for all employees.

4.4 Publicly funded counselling services provide LGBTQ+ specific counselling by staff with education specific to effective therapeutic work with LGBTQ+ people. Services should be accessible to all ages and intersections within the community, ensuring proper triage processes that identify LGBTQ+ individuals who are at risk and should be prioritized if waitlists exist. Cultural interpretation is essential in making certain these services are truly accessible.

**Safety and Visibility**

Persistent and pervasive homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and cissexism threaten the physical, psychological and social safety of LGBTQ+ people. For those individuals who are openly out and for those who may be perceived as queer, the potential for or threat of harassment, discrimination and/or violence is a daily reality. For those who are not openly out in any or all areas of their lives, the risks related to being outed create a unique brand of anxiety and isolation that can severely impact health and well-being. There is an urgent need for clearly identifiable, safe spaces throughout the community.

**Therefore it is recommended:**

5.1 Public institutions and private organizations actively and consistently communicate their commitment to creating climates of safety and confidentiality in their service of LGBTQ+ communities. Organizations should pay particular attention to their confidentiality policies and their complaints processes, ensuring service users are aware of them and the rights they protect. Accommodations to protect the privacy of queer and trans individuals should be offered and made as needed.

5.2 The City of Hamilton (Economic Development) works with the Chamber of Commerce to bring together LGBTQ+ owned and operated and allied businesses in Hamilton to raise visibility of LGBTQ+ spaces in which to do business, following best practices from the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce and models in other jurisdictions.

5.3 Public institutions and flagship employers mark days significant to the LGBTQ+ community (e.g. Pride, International Day Against Homophobia Transphobia) in order to publicly declare intentions and actions in making organizations inclusive and positive spaces for workers, clients and customers.

**Bullying**

- Causing fear, distress or harm to another person.

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**Research and Community Planning**

Methodology limitations, including inadequate funding resources, mean these community consultations are not as robust as they could be. With support for more comprehensive community based research a more representative picture of the diverse needs of LGBTQ+ people in Hamilton could be attained. There was an expressed desire from the community to have a space in which people could access information related to the local history of LGBTQ+ people.

**Therefore it is recommended:**

6.1 Local, provincial and federal funding sources create intentional opportunities to support ongoing and broader-reaching research within the LGBTQ+ community to better understand the needs of the diverse community and all of its intersections including specific outreach to populations who experience additional barriers to participation.

6.2 Leaders in Hamilton’s vibrant arts community work with the LGBTQ+ community to archive the history of LGBTQ+ people in Hamilton providing opportunities for public access, story sharing and the development of intergenerational connections within the LGBTQ+ community of communities.

6.3 The creation of an asset map of resources and services for LGBTQ+ people in Hamilton be undertaken and shared with the community as part of a larger needs assessment, paying particular attention to the gaps related to trans people, people of colour, and people who are (dis)abled.

6.4 Public services and flagship employers with LGBTQ+ Positive Space initiatives come together for community-wide collaboration and knowledge exchange opportunities at least twice a year with support from the City of Hamilton and the SPRC. (e.g. Queer Youth Planning Collaborative, City of Hamilton LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, Hamilton Police Services, Hamilton Health Sciences).

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