The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) community is estimated to be approximately 10% of the population. That means there are approximately 50 thousand members of the LGBTQ community in Hamilton. However, despite the number of people who might identify as part of the LGBTQ community, Hamilton lacks LGBTQ identified safe community spaces, services and resources. The reasons for this are complex and inextricably tied to homophobia.

The Board of Directors for Hamilton Pride Festival Inc. understood the significance of the lack of community spaces for the LGBTQ community. They decided to partner with the Social Planning and Research Council to conduct the data collection, analysis and report writing, which resulted in a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The principal recommendations of this work include:

- There is an essential need for LGBTQ-specific services and resources in Hamilton. Respondents identified the lack of queer- and transpositive health care, the need for social opportunities to take place outside of bars, and for counseling services.

- Many service providers in the community are lacking anti-racism/anti-oppression training that would help to interrupt homophobia. Youth and other participants identified the education system as significantly lacking information and support for LGBTQ-identified students in Hamilton.

- The need for a community centre in which members can find services and resources particular to their needs, has been strongly identified in this research.

- Increased visibility of the community, along with individuals and organizations that can champion LGBTQ community issues, is necessary to interrupt homophobia in Hamilton.

- Members of the LGBTQ community lack a feeling of safety living in Hamilton because of the reality of homophobia.

3 out of 15 youth participants said they had already attempted suicide in part because of the isolation they feel in the community.
ON ANY GIVEN NIGHT, 2007

New Homelessness Report Shows Signs of Hope

Jeff Wingard, Senior Social Planner

The growth of homelessness in Hamilton is slowing. On Any Given Night: 2007 Edition, the new report, jointly authored by the SPRC and the City of Hamilton, shows that the number of people in shelters has remained steady at just over 400 people nightly for the last four years. This plateau is welcome news to a community that has seen the number of people who are homeless rise from 160 people nightly in 1995 to over 420 in 2004 - an increase of over 160%.

The report cites federal funding (Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative and the newer Homelessness Partnering Strategy) as playing the major role in slowing the growth of homelessness over the last four years. The funding has created a wide variety of programs and services, including youth transitional housing, an emergency shelter for families, trusteeship and prevention programs.

However, this ray of hope is balanced by other information in the report:

- Over 3,950 people used an emergency shelter in 2007 - close to 1% of the population.
- Over 1,640 women and children used a shelter for women fleeing abuse - this number has remained steady over the past 7 years.
- There are 3,817 people on the waiting list for rent-geared-to-income housing - down from 4,200 in 2006.
- Social assistance rates are inadequate. The shelter allowance for a single person on Ontario Works is $342, while the average rent for a 1 bedroom apartment in Hamilton is $610.
- Over 26,000 renter households (22% of tenant households) are paying more than ½ their income on rent - putting them at risk of homelessness.

On Any Given Night: 2007 makes use of a new source of data called the Homelessness Individuals and Families Information System or HIFIS (pronounced hye-fiss). This data tells us how many different individuals stay in shelters and for how long - information that was previously unavailable. What this new information shows is consistent with a picture of homelessness across North America: 80% of people experience homelessness for a relatively short period of time - less than 6 weeks again - and then are not seen in the shelter system again. Approximately 12-15% use the shelter system multiple times over the course of a year - staying between 6 weeks and 4 months. Approximately 5-8% of people are in the shelters most of the year. In fact, there were 30 men who were in shelters for more than 300 days in 2007. A new pilot program called Hostels to Homes is working with these men to help them to transition into more appropriate homes with supports.

The full report is available on the SPRC website: http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca.

CHILLING AT CHILL HILL

Jacob, Silvio, Josh, and Ashley with Ben Laurie

The new youth program in east Hamilton, Chill Hill, is up and running. Together we wrote a list of the weekly games and activities. We have fun playing different games such as Islands, Phonebook Wars, Fooze Ball, Charades, and more. We also get to design things together like airplanes, graffiti signs, and Chill Hill logos. At Chill Hill we always have a snack, and talk about other ideas that we can do in the future. We’re even planning a camping trip!

Thursdays at Chill Hill we have a chance to bake something to eat. There is usually six or seven of us. We make things like white chocolate cookies, potato wedges, brownies, and banana bread. We start by washing our hands before we bake, and when we’re finished we make sure to clean up.

Ben’s parents sent us baking supplies, and a letter, so we wrote a thank you note back with some cookies for his parents. Also on Thursdays we make enough food to share with the 7-12 year old program. They really enjoy our cooking. Next week we hope to make pizzas. Chilling at Chill Hill is really fun.

Picture by Destiny
With funding through the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Today's Family Inc., in collaboration with St. Mark’s Cooperative Pre School, partnered with the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC) to assess the child care needs of families in the Dundas community. The purpose of the research was to develop a better understanding of local child care needs from the perspectives of key stakeholders, and to identify innovative strategies that complement the existing child care system and meet existing needs.

During 2007 the SPRC consulted with Dundas parents and local service providers to develop a clearer picture of the challenges that some families face in securing and maintaining quality child care arrangements. A range of methods were employed, including surveys, key informant interviews and focus groups.

All outward appearances would suggest that Dundas is an affluent community. In fact, compared to the city of Hamilton as a whole, average family incomes are considerably higher. Like any community however, Dundas is home to families with a range of incomes. According to Statistics Canada census data (2001) 12% of Dundas families were living in poverty, including 39% of lone parent families.

Child care advocates contend that without adequate child care, parents or caregivers face exclusion from the labour force and marginalization through poverty and unemployment. Reliable child care services are also important in helping parents balance work and family responsibilities, and reducing stress on families.

Challenges related to employment and employability emerged throughout the course of the research, as did the resulting stress on families. The root of these challenges, according to parents and service providers from the Dundas community include: the lack of licensed child care centre spaces for infants and toddlers; the difficulties in finding care for a sick child or a child with special needs; finding care during ‘off hours’; and the high cost of care.

The final report includes an overview of the research methodology employed in this study, a profile of the Dundas community and findings from each phase of the research. The report concludes with a review of existing models or strategies related to the identified needs.

A set of four recommendations are included in the report. Recommendations focus on innovative strategies that would enhance the current child care system in the Dundas community. You can view the full report on the SPRC website at: www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca.
HWDSB DIVERSITY AUDIT

Deirdre Pike, Social Planner

In 2006, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) initiated an evaluation process aimed at gathering data on the diversity of the staff in the organization. The administration recognized that it lacked the statistical data necessary to fully inform human resource practices connected with staff recruitment, retention and development. After consultation with a variety of community organizations about the diversity in Hamilton as a whole, it was determined that the areas of diversity in which information would be gathered would include ethno-racial, language, physical and mental health, sexual orientation and gender.

The confidential nature of the data collection underscored the need for an independent third party overseeing the process so the HWDSB engaged the SPRC in February 2007 with Social Planner Deirdre Pike leading the work. The SPRC then collected and analysed the data, reporting the findings to the HWDSB and then to the wider community.

The overall response rate from the surveys was over 70%. The data was collected as an overall sample of the HWDSB workforce and did not examine diversity characteristics within various employment groups. Some highlights of the findings include:

- only 4.5% of HWDSB staff identify as a visible minority whereas 11% of Hamilton’s population selected this identity category (Census 2001)
- 5% of HWDSB staff have a first language other than English or French, while 24.4% of Hamilton’s population report this experience (Census 2001)
- 7% of HWDSB staff identify as having some level of disability, while almost 14% of Canadians report this (PALS 2001)
- only 2.1% of HWDSB staff reported their identity as LGBQ, though it is generally accepted that on average about 10% of the population identifies as such

The audit found that HWDSB staff identified 76.7% as female and 48.9% as male; however, the overall gender breakdown for Hamilton is 51.1% females and 48.9% males.

The SPRC presented the HWDSB with a slate of recommendations to help it achieve the goal of becoming a diversity-competent organization. The results of this report will help create a database of the diversity of the Board’s workforce, initiate a review of recruitment strategies, begin the process of evaluating the work environment with a view to supporting individuals from designated groups, and serve as a starting point for the diversification of the HWDSB’s workforce.

SPRC UNITED WAY WORKPLACE CAMPAIGN

The SPRC workplace campaign concluded in December 2007 with a coffee house party at Che’s Burrito in Hess Village. The campaign successfully raised $ 7110.

Many thanks to Christina Walters, Deirdre Pike, Mark Fraser, Liz Millar, Jennie Vengris and others in working to make the campaign a success.

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