

CREATING POSITIVE SPACE FOR THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY IN HAMILTON

NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY IN HAMILTON
Written by: Deirdre Pike, Social Planner Spring 2008

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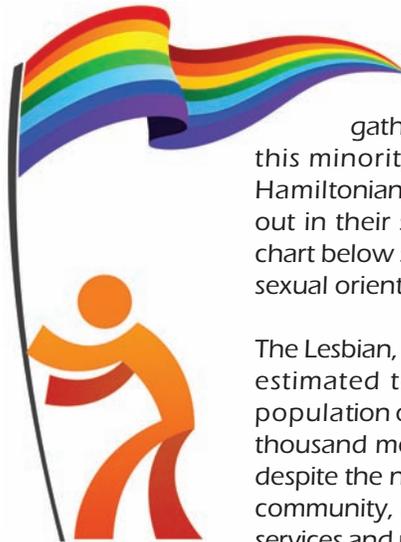
Ph: 905-522-1148
sprc@sprc.hamilton.on.ca
www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca

Coming out:

the process by which LGBTQ people disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity.

People who are "closeted" or "in the closet" hide the fact that they are LGBTQ.

Some people "come out of the closet" in some situations (e.g., with other LGBTQ friends) and not in others (e.g., at work).



Through consultation with LGBTQ-identified people in Hamilton in 2006 and 2007, it became clear that, with its lack of services, resources and safe gathering spaces, Hamilton is not currently a positive space for this minority community. In fact, the sense of safety for LGBTQ Hamiltonians means that only about half of all survey participants were out in their schools, neighbourhoods, and work environments. The chart below shows the percentage of people who no longer hide their sexual orientation or gender identity in the certain environments.

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ¹) community is estimated to be approximately 10% of the population². With a population of just over 500,000, this 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.

Comfortable Situations Being Out



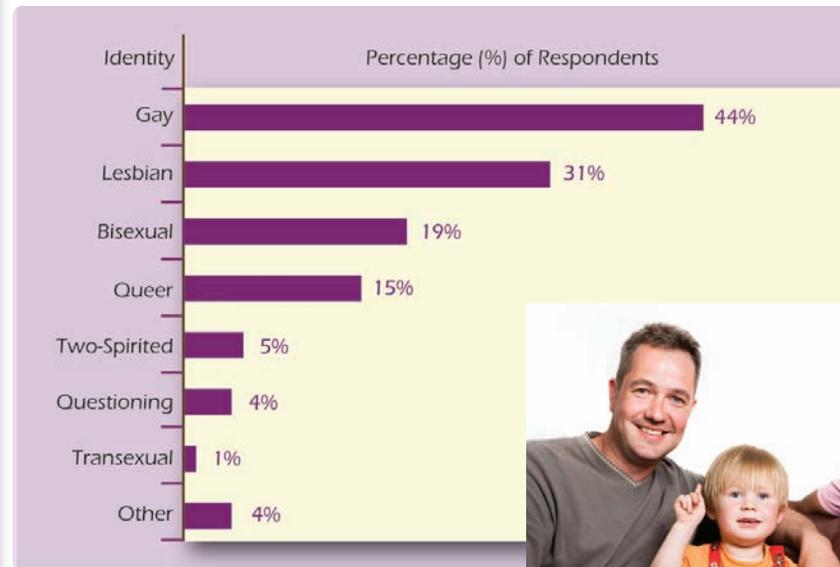
¹LGBTQ: a commonly used, shortened initialism for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgendered, two spirit, intersex, queer and questioning individuals/communities. This acronym may or may not be used in a particular community as language continues to evolve. After a 2005 LGBTQ community consultation in Hamilton, the acronym LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, queer) was determined to be most commonly accepted, though many will still have other preferences. (e.g. LGBT, GLBT, LGB, LGBTTTIQO, QT)

² Family Therapy Networker, 1991: "from Kinsey's historic study in the 1940s to the present, surveys consistently show that 10 percent of the population is either gay or lesbian."

Assessing the needs of the LGBTQ community through surveys, focus groups and key informant interviews, this community based research has helped to articulate many needs of the LGBTQ community in Hamilton with recommendations as to how these could be addressed effectively.



Who did we talk to?



Note: Some people relate to more than one identity and therefore chose to check off more than one word to identify themselves accordingly.

“Instead of teachers calling kids on it when inappropriate things were being said, they actually added to them. Young people don’t have the tools to protect themselves the way adults do.”

Gay male participant

What did we hear?



Words describing experiences accessing LGBTQ resources in Hamilton?

- Frustrating
- Impossible
- Non-existent
- Uninformed
- Laughable

Gaps

- Recreational opportunities
- Counselling – one on one and groups
- Education – sexual health curriculum
- Health care professionals
- Central location – “One stop shopping” model
- Safe public spaces - washrooms
- Social opportunities outside of bars



RECOMMENDATIONS

Services and Resources



Throughout each part of the data collection for this needs assessment, participants made it clear that there is an essential need for LGBTQ-specific services and resources in Hamilton. Respondents identified that particular attention needs to be paid to the lack of queer- and trans- positive health care, the need for social opportunities to take place outside of bars and for counselling services related to coming out, especially for LGBTQ youth, to be developed.

1. Allocate funds to support the development of LGBTQ specific services and resources.

2. Mainstream service providers evaluate their services and resources for LGBTQ individuals and identify where and how they can be expanded. Sustainable funding from a variety of sources must be made available to organizations that take on this important work.

3. Allocate funds to develop local information tools for LGBTQ individuals and their allies such as a resource centre for knowledge exchange, a 24-hour phone line, and a website.

“It’s hard enough to find a doctor to begin with, let alone someone who is aware of the issues that queer people face... We need queer- positive doctors we can talk to.”

Lesbian participant

Training and Education

Many service providers in the community are lacking anti-racism/anti-oppression training that would assist staff and volunteers in offering services and resources that respond more appropriately to the needs of the LGBTQ community and 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.

1. Workplaces offer anti-racism/anti-oppression training for all staff and volunteers, with an emphasis on heterosexism and homophobia.

2. School boards encourage the development of Positive Space groups and ensure that LGBTQ resources are visible and accessible

3. Sexual health curriculum in secondary schools is made inclusive and teaches LGBTQ sexual health issues

3 out of 15 youth participants said they had already attempted suicide in part because of the isolation they feel in the community.

Community Centre and Programming

Like many minority communities, the need for a community centre in which members can find services and resources, including social and recreational opportunities particular to their needs, has been strongly identified in this research.

1. Government funding be made available for an organization or collaborative of organizations to offer resources and services for members of the LGBTQ community in a “one-stop shopping” model at an LGBTQ community centre.

2. Hamilton Pride and other queer- and trans- positive service providers form a community partnership to increase the amount of available programming that promotes healthy and active lifestyles for LGBTQ citizens of all ages.





RECOMMENDATIONS continued



Visibility

Increased visibility of the community, along with individuals and organizations that can champion LGBTQ community issues, is necessary to interrupt homophobia in Hamilton. It is also important to note that members of the LGBTQ community come from a spectrum of locations when it comes to visibility or being out in the community.

1. The LGBTQ community seek and encourage champions to come forward to assist in breaking the invisibility and isolation that community members experience.
2. Local media, members of the LGBTQ community and their allies work to bring LGBTQ issues to the public and political sphere.
3. Careful consideration be given to balance in terms of allowing anonymity and confidentiality for closeted individuals seeking to access services and resources at a community agency or future community centre, and the need for such a centre and the LGBTQ community to have a visible presence.

Homophobia

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

1. Existing LGBTQ organizations and committees such as Hamilton Pride Festival Inc., Hamilton's LGBTQ Community Wellness Centre, the City of Hamilton's GLBT Advisory Committee, and the Hamilton Police GLBT Task Force, work with community partners to develop an action plan to reduce the number of LGBTQ-based committed hate crimes and to seek the removal of barriers to reporting LGBTQ-based hate crimes to Hamilton Police Services.
2. Key employers in Hamilton such as the City of Hamilton, Hamilton Health Sciences, the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board, Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board, Hamilton Police Services and others ensure employee anti-racism/anti-oppression training and supporting campaigns that address homophobia such as May 17, the International Day to End Homophobia, and February 14, Pink Triangle Day.



Research

As is often the case, the more questions that are asked, the more questions that are raised. It is noted that there are many areas of life in the LGBTQ community that have not been addressed through this initial needs assessment.

1. Funding be made available for more research to look deeper into the realities of life in the LGBTQ community of Hamilton so the needs of the community can be more fully addressed.

Homophobia:

irrational fear, hatred, prejudice or negative attitudes toward people who are gay or lesbian. Homophobia can take subtle and extreme forms, such as jokes, name-calling, exclusion, gay bashing, etc.



Hamilton Pride Festival Inc.

THE ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION



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