



SPEAK OUT!

COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS ON MAKING HAMILTON AN LGBTQ+ POSITIVE CITY

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1.0 Acknowledgements

The consultations and this report could not have come together without the generous contributions of the following organizations and individuals:

- **Over 100 members of Hamilton's LGBTQ+ Community** made this whole report possible by attending one or more of the five sessions and bravely sharing their experiences of life in Hamilton as part of the minority sexual orientation and/or gender minority community, otherwise known as the queer or trans community.
- **The Speak Out Advisory Committee** saw the project through from beginning to end. It was comprised of LGBTQ+ students from McMaster University, staff members of the Hamilton AIDS Network, SPRC, Good Shepherd Centres and the Catholic Children's Aid, as well as volunteers not connected to a specific organization. The majority of the committee identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community with two members identifying as allies. Approximately 20% of the committee or ad hoc advisors were trans-identified.
- **Facilitation for the community consultations** was offered by members of the committee with additional help provided by volunteers, some particular to the demographic focus of the consultation.
- **The Hamilton Community Foundation, the United Way** (through ongoing support of the SPRC) **and Pretty Grit** provided funding to help offset the costs of the consultations and the report release.
- **Good Shepherd Centres** provided locations for four of the five sessions as well as coffee and refreshment breaks with staff to help organize them.
- **The Steel Lounge**, was a self-described queer-owned and operated bar and restaurant. Working with owner Emily Groom and Chef Marg Ann Roorda, they provided tremendous support with food provided at cost, delivered hot and served free of charge to each community consultation and the larger report back to the community. Sadly, The Steel Lounge closed just 6 months later, leaving yet another gap in the community.
- **The Hamilton Best Start Network** supported the inclusion of a separate consultation with LGBTQ+ parents and parents of LGBTQ+ children with financial support for space and refreshments. (Results of session reflected in report at <http://hamiltonbeststart.ca/eypc/>)
- **Writing contributions** were made by: Jennifer Rollings, a Masters of Social Work student doing her placement at the SPRC during the time of the consultations. Jennifer was instrumental in ensuring the sessions ran smoothly and the data gathered at each session was properly transcribed, sorted and analyzed;

Stephanie D’Odorico wrote some of the key finding sections as well as the first draft of the youth section while doing her Bachelor of Social Work student placement at the SPRC. Virginia McCarthy also contributed to the report while completing her Bachelor of Social Work. Noel Valade volunteered at the SPRC over the summer of 2016 and, as a youth participant in the consultation, was very helpful in pulling that section of the report together.

- **Susan Gapka, Bernie Thompson, Tim McClemon, Jackson Gates, Ben Bailey, Heather Mackenzie, and Savoy Howe** each spoke at one of the community consultations. One speaker chose to be unnamed in this report because she is afraid of the homophobia she will face from her community as a newcomer. Each speaker shared personal stories related to the population focus and set the tone and framework for participants to share their own knowledge gained through experiences as LGBTQ+ community members or service providers in Hamilton. (More on their input in the appropriate section.)

Thank you to each and every one who made this essential work possible to ensure Hamilton can be a positive space for LGBTQ+ people to live, work, learn and play.

2.0 Introduction

In 2006, Hamilton Pride Festival Inc., connected with the local Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton to design and implement the first Needs Assessment of the LGBTQ+ Community in Hamilton. ([Needs Assessment of the LGBTQ Community in Hamilton, SPRC, 2007](#)) Encouragement and a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation made the work possible and the SPRC invested further in a follow up executive summary. ([Creating Positive Space for the LGBTQ Community in Hamilton, SPRC, 2008](#))

It has been more than 10 years since then and this report builds on that previous work as well as the five facilitated community conversations held in the winter of 2016 called, “Speak Out!” The results include a set of recommendations, some new and many repeated from the first report, calling for immediate, medium and long-term community attention and action. That set of recommendations was presented at a community report-back event in June 2016. (The report can be found here: http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/SpeakOUT_2016_WEB.pdf)

Since the time of that first report and its many recommendations to make Hamilton a better place for LGBTQ+¹ people, the story might be described as a proverbial “one step forward and two steps back.” The purpose of the Speak Out consultations was to provide a place for that story to be told and recorded in an effort to determine the need for more LGBTQ+ specific supports in Hamilton.

On the social service front, The Well, Hamilton’s LGBTQ+ Community Wellness Centre, started in 2006, had provided as much support to the community as it could, relying largely on volunteers for almost 10 years. In 2015, the efforts to keep The Well open were no longer sustainable and its demise became apparent in the community as service providers started calling each other inquiring where to turn for help with LGBTQ+ clients and a vacuum when it came to local LGBTQ+ specific supports available.

There are signs of local social service and health care providers pulling together better health care access through groups like the Queer-Trans Youth Planning collaborative and Trans Health Care Providers. Meanwhile, support groups for LGBTQ+ people and their allies struggle as they are run by dedicated but stretched volunteers and LGBTQ+ specific counselling specializing in supporting people who are coming out or who have experienced trauma related to homophobia or transphobia, doesn’t exist.

¹ During the writing of the first needs assessment (2007) the initialism, LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer), was the most commonly used string of letters in local, provincial and national contexts to refer to the diverse identities within the community once simply characterized as “the gay community.” At the time of the Speak Out consultations (2016) the committee chose to recognize the deficiency of that initialism by adding a + symbol to the end. Other variations abound to more intentionally recognize Indigenous people and other genders including LGBT2SQ+ and LGBTTIQ. See Glossary for more information.

On the social networking and organizing fronts, a decade ago there were at least half a dozen bars or lounges considered LGBTQ+ positive, aka “gay bars” in Hamilton. These bars were far more than a safer place to enjoy an alcoholic beverage. “Gay bars and other LGBT spaces are historic places of belonging, where queer persons could go to learn and find themselves in community.”²

As 2017 began, the much celebrated Steel Lounge had closed its doors after less than two years as a gathering place for queer³ and trans people to find themselves and others to socialize and organize. The Embassy Nite Club, long known as an LGBTQ+ dance spot, was under renovations and has subsequently closed its doors. There could be, and likely are, other restaurants and bars in Hamilton that are LGBTQ+ friendly but they are not “gay bars” that provide the kind of safer experience for which people in the community are asking.

With these stories in the background, the SPRC set out to investigate the First Voice⁴ experience of LGBTQ+ people in Hamilton a decade from the first one which had begun with a survey at Hamilton Pride in 2006.

A committee formed with leadership from the SPRC and seed funding from the Hamilton Community Foundation with the premise of holding four community meetings to take the pulse of the community, asking what is going well in Hamilton for LGBTQ+ people and where are the gaps that make it difficult for LGBTQ+ people to live, work, learn and play in this city.

The name “Speak Out” was chosen for the initiative and a plan was configured to gather the best information from the four sessions. That plan is outlined in the following Methodology section.

Postscript: A year following the Speak Out consultations, a group identified as LGBTQ2SIA+ community members, in partnership with the Aids Network and researchers from McMaster University, launched an expansive, community-driven, on-line survey as part of a quantitative study to gauge the needs of the LGBTQ2SIA+ community in the city. The study was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and has also received funding from McMaster University. The data from over 900 respondents on topics ranging from health care to social life and employment, is presently being analysed. A report with the results is expected to be ready by May 2019.

² <http://blogs.kcrw.com/dna/why-gay-bars-are-vital-for-lgbt-communities>

³ See Glossary in the Appendices for this and other words that may need further explanation.

⁴ The Lived Experience Advisory Council calls user-led initiatives when applied to homelessness a “first voice” approach, which maintains that “the people who are living [any social issue] usually have the best understanding about what the problem is and what needs to be done to address it” (“Nothing About Us Without Us” 2016).

3.0 Methodology

This project involved qualitative data collection through public consultation sessions using participatory research techniques combining individual responses, small table talks and large group feedback with opportunities for both oral and written responses to two key questions:

- 1) What makes Hamilton a great place for LGBTQ+ people to live, work, play and learn?
- 2) What would make Hamilton a greater place for LGBTQ+ people to live, work, play and learn?

Guest speakers

The committee chose guest speakers to share personal stories related to the population focus for the session, setting the tone for openness and trust. They would also identify the framework for participants to share their own knowledge gained through experiences as LGBTQ+ community members or service providers in Hamilton. To that end the speakers were asked to answer the same questions the participants would be answering later: “What makes Hamilton a great place for LGBTQ+ people to live, work, play and learn” and, “What would make Hamilton a greater place for LGBTQ+ people to live, work, play and learn?” These would be answered from the perspective of the speaker’s identity such as trans, youth or older adult, for example.

Mural activity

The committee painted two eight-foot long murals to use for the first large group activity. One had the colours of the rainbow flag representing Pride on one half and fading out to a dull side with stripes in various shades of grey. The second was the same length but comprised of the colours of the Trans flag (light pink, blue and white) and fading out to similar shades of grey.

When attached to the wall the murals provided a place for participants to fix their multi-coloured sticky notes with responses to the large group questions.

“What makes Hamilton a great place for LGBTQ+ people to live, work, play and learn.” Answers to that question would be posted on the colourful or positive side of the mural, representing things that were LGBTQ+ inclusive.

The second question was, **“What would make Hamilton a great place for LGBTQ+ people to live, work, play and learn.”** Answers to that question would be posted on the grey or negative side of the mural, representing things that needed to change to make Hamilton more LGBTQ+ inclusive.

Table conversations

Once the participants in the large group had answered the first general questions using the mural as a backdrop the participants chose or were assigned tables to discuss one of six provided topics using the basic premise for the question with the mural activity. The six topics were: health care, education, housing, recreation, support services, and social.

The questions used to discuss each topic were:

- 1) What makes Hamilton a good place for _____ (LGBTQ+ youth, Trans people, older LGBTQ+ adults, all LGBTQ+ people) when it comes to _____ (healthcare, education, housing, recreation, support services, and social)
- 2) What would make Hamilton a better place for _____ (LGBTQ+ youth, Trans people, older LGBTQ+ adults, all LGBTQ+ people) when it comes to _____ (healthcare, education, housing, recreation, support services, and social).

Facilitation and Recording

Members of the committee and some extra volunteers associated with the SPRC provided facilitation of the table conversations in each consultation or recorded the conversation by hand or on laptops.

An exception to this pattern was the Trans Community Consultation where it was agreed to have members of the trans community or identified cisgender allies take the facilitator and recorder roles instead of the committee members.

Limitations

With limited financial resources, the committee was confined to holding only four focus groups originally. With input from people at the table and informal conversations with others in the community, the four groups to consult were identified as the Trans community, LGBTQ+ youth, older LGBTQ+ adults, and a general session for all LGBTQ+ people across intersections (e.g. race, mobility, age).

The Hamilton Best Start Network supported the inclusion of a fifth consultation with LGBTQ+ parents and parents of LGBTQ+ children with financial support for space and refreshments. (Results of session reflected in report at <http://hamiltonbeststart.ca/eycp/>)

With more resources session could have been held for other unique demographics within the LGBTQ+ “community of communities,” as it is sometimes known, such as gay men, [dis]abled queer and trans people, or lesbians.

Service providers were invited to each session but with the intent of having a separate focus group within the sessions to make the LGBTQ+ participants feel safer to speak freely. Unfortunately this wasn't possible when numbers were small (older adult session) and if a separate room wasn't available the service providers stayed in the room but at their own table. It wasn't ideal but it was an effective solution overall.

Wanting to ensure enough time to advertise the sessions broadly the committee chose dates early in 2016 spread over the course of 6 weeks. After taking the necessary time to investigate affordable locations with the required features such as fully accessible, the committee landed on Good Shepherd and First Place.

When considering the session for older adults (55 and over) the committee chose a daytime session thinking it may facilitate more attendance. The location chosen was the Elizabeth Bagshaw Room in First Place, a seniors' subsidized housing building.

The remaining consultations took place at the community room in Good Shepherd Square, 15 Ray Street North at King Street West. While the location isn't right downtown, it is on a main thoroughfare with many buses stopping right out front and it is fully accessible which many affordable downtown meeting locations are lacking.

The consultations were advertised widely through email lists and websites including the SPRC, the Hamilton AIDS Network, Good Shepherd and other major social service providers, the Queer Youth Planning Collaborative, the Street Youth Planning Collaborative, the Women's Housing Planning Collaborative, McMaster's School of Social Work and Gender Studies, Mohawk's Social Inc., and the HWDSB. Besides attention on Twitter and Facebook, traditional media coverage included an editorial and a Spotlight note in the Hamilton Spectator, and a radio interview on CHML.

Advertising related to the consultations offered contact information where people could register or get more information but registration was not required. As people entered the space for each consultation, volunteers greeted the participants and offered a registration where they could sign in with a name, contact information and organization affiliation if applicable. Many participants opted out of registering, preferring to stay anonymous. Through a physical counting of participants at each session and comparing to the attendance list there were close to 50 people who did not register by name.

4.0 Mural Activity Responses and Themes

During each session the two flag murals were taped to the walls and participants used adhesive notes to write their responses to the two questions and post them on the appropriate side. After each session the adhesive notes were collected and collated for themes.

4.1 Assets

The first question consultation participants were asked was, “**What makes Hamilton a great place for LGBTQ+ people to live, work, play and learn?**” All community members, service providers, and allies were invited to participate with as many responses as they could list. The following themes emerged from each of the five sessions.

Safety

Overwhelmingly, the LGBTQ+ community identified private spaces as the safest and most supportive places in their lives. This includes home, or the homes of friends and family members. It means people feel safe with their friends and sometimes their family. There is also a sense of the LGBTQ+ community as a whole being an asset in Hamilton, including its strength, resiliency, history, and passion.

Looking at the public sphere decreases the number of places that feel safe and welcoming for LGBTQ+ people. Some bars, restaurants, cafes, and small businesses were named as inclusive and accepting. Arts and cultural sites were also experienced as welcoming. Some people were appreciative that their churches and sporting groups felt safe for them, though these responses were not as frequent.

Support Services

When accessing community services in Hamilton, the LGBTQ+ community identified some options that are LGBTQ+ specific supports, as well as others that may not be specific to the LGBTQ+ population but were nevertheless experienced as supportive. Areas in which LGBTQ+ specific programs were created within existing services were highlighted as assets. This includes the Good Shepherd LGBTQ+ youth worker and trans-friendly swims at the YWCA. Additionally, where gender neutral washrooms were available, this contributed to feelings of being welcomed.

It was acknowledged that services have become more LGBTQ+ inclusive thanks to Positive Space training initiatives. Rainbow flags and Positive Space stickers were seen as important markers of LGBTQ+ affirming spaces for both services as well as local businesses. Commitment to improvement was seen as an indication of hope that there will be ongoing work in this area throughout the city of Hamilton.

Education

The topic of education underlines many existing supports in all levels of schooling for LGBTQ+ youth. From elementary school to high school to post-secondary, youth are met with some educators and staff who are knowledgeable and affirming.

The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board celebrates the Day of Difference annually and hosts Positive Space Groups in many of its high schools throughout the city. LGBTQ+ children and their parents also note the support they have received in local elementary schools. At the post-secondary level, both McMaster University and Mohawk College are recognized as having spaces in which LGBTQ+ people feel safe. At McMaster, the Queer Students Community Centre stands out as an inclusive space, while at Mohawk, Social Inc. is known for being supportive. In addition, McMaster is home to a Pride Week each year and several gender neutral washrooms on campus.

Health care/Housing/Income

In the areas of access to health care, housing, income and employment, fewer positive experiences surfaced. Some LGBTQ+ folks were able to report that they had access to excellent health care. Some practices were noted for being queer positive/educated & inclusive in serving the needs of LGBTQ+ people (e.g. McMaster Family Practices, Hamilton Family Health Team). A few found housing in Hamilton affordable and supportive especially when compared to areas such as Toronto or Mississauga. As well, certain neighbourhoods in Hamilton were identified as more inclusive than others, such as Locke Street. Affirming experiences at work included specific managers and colleagues, though no large-scale movement towards accepting workplaces emerged as a trend.

Community

Finally, LGBTQ+ people experience some sense of community acceptance and respect that helps make Hamilton home. Seeing signs of inclusiveness, such as Positive Space stickers, Pride flags, gender neutral washrooms, LGBTQ+ specific services and visible queer leaders contribute to the hope that a truly affirming and responsive community can exist for all LGBTQ+ people in Hamilton.

4.2 Gaps and Barriers

The second question was, “**What would make Hamilton a great place for LGBTQ+ people to live, work, play and learn.**” Answers to that question would be posted on the grey or negative side of the mural, representing things that needed to change to make Hamilton more LGBTQ+ inclusive. The following themes emerged across the five consultations

Community Centre

A strong finding from this activity was an acknowledgement of the significant gaps in services and programming for the city’s LGBTQ+ population. A lack of supports for LGBTQ+ people are felt through all areas of life: physical health, emotional well-being, housing, employment or income security, education, social opportunities, and personal safety. It was also clear that there is a desire for improved communication and access

to information, since LGBTQ+ people are at a loss as to where to go to get help. The creation of a new LGBTQ+ focused space and the services to accompany it is at the forefront of the community's mind when it comes to making Hamilton more inclusive.

Community/Recreation

Social isolation was a common experience among many participants. There is a sense that there are not enough spaces in Hamilton that are safe and accessible for LGBTQ+ people. It was especially identified that non-bar locations are in demand to meet diverse needs, such as youth who are not of age, community members who do not wish to be around alcohol or the desire for a more relaxed environment where socialization can occur. The community also wants Pride to play a larger role in Hamilton with events that reflect their various identities. Since Pride is held once a year, other LGBTQ+ activities could occur more frequently, such as family meet-ups, outdoor events, or cultural festivals. Participants needed information about such events to be available in a wide variety of locations, ideally, centralized out of one LGBTQ+ community hub.

Health care

One of the services suggested to be a part of the LGBTQ+ community centre was health care options. Access to affirming health care is desperately needed for the LGBTQ+ community. Doctors and other health care providers who are educated about LGBTQ+ affirming practices are in significant demand. The unique needs of trans people and older LGBTQ+ adults are specific areas in which the medical field is not yet responsive enough in Hamilton. LGBTQ+ people in need of these services often have to travel outside of the city, face long wait times before receiving treatment, meet strict and restrictive criteria for service or attempt to get their needs met by ineffective and disrespectful doctors.

Support Services

The current landscape of community services to support and enhance the emotional well-being of LGBTQ+ people is scarce. Participants identified that they need counselling, groups, workshops, peer support, and mental health services. These basic services contribute to the overall health and wellness of a community. The LGBTQ+ community may face particular barriers to accessing these services, such as being unable to find information about what services exist, having to repeat their stories when services are segmented and do not communicate with each other, fears of disclosing their identities to agencies or workers that are not LGBTQ+ specific or facing non-inclusive forms.

Education

When LGBTQ+ people engage with all levels of educational systems, they are faced with persistent heteronormativity and the use of gender binaries. Educators and administrators are not knowledgeable enough about the LGBTQ+ community and how to support them. This includes experiences as an LGBTQ+ child or a child with LGBTQ+ parents. Educators are in need of more training about LGBTQ+ identities, how to use inclusive language in their teaching and ways to support LGBTQ+ children and youth, including making appropriate community referrals.

Students attending school need opportunities to participate in positive space groups, access to resources, and the discriminatory behaviour of their peers to be consistently interrupted and corrected by teachers and educational support staff.

Employment/Income

Similar to educational environments, the community identified the need for better training and better policies in workplaces. They wanted access to employment opportunities that were safe and stable, regardless of their identity. Themes of low income as a barrier to getting their needs met arose throughout the consultations. Not having access to secure and adequate income meant that for some people, the affordability of food, clothing, services, medical options, and housing were jeopardized. This may be especially true for those who experience certain intersections of their identities, such as queer older adults, youth, newcomers or trans people.

Housing

LGBTQ+ community members had ideas about how housing in Hamilton can be more inclusive to them. They sought housing services such as LGBTQ+ or trans-only shelters, group homes, and support workers. More affordable housing options was high on the priority list. The concept of community housing for LGBTQ+ youth, seniors or trans people was brought up. Members also believed long-term care housing options for LGBTQ+ older adults were vital. LGBTQ+ older adults face many multi-level barriers when seeking housing supports that meet their aging needs. Experiences of discrimination, having to go back into the closet or being separated from a loved one were continued areas of strain and unsupported need. Whether or not these possibilities are realized, LGBTQ+ people are in need of housing support workers who can help them navigate their housing options and advocate for their rights.

Safety

The topic of not feeling safe being “out” in the community recurred in this project. Some participants related this to queerness being made invisible and the lack of LGBTQ+ visible representation within the larger community. Participants disclosed experiences of harassment in public based on their perceived LGBTQ+ identity. Feeling unsafe, whether alone or with a partner was a concern throughout all sessions. Safety in washrooms and change rooms was a significant issue because of how these spaces are most often designated “male” and “female” which does not capture the spectrum of identities people have. Discomfort was also felt when it came to meeting new people and having to navigate the coming out process repeatedly. Several situations presented challenges where there are traditional gendered expectations to which someone is not conforming such as buying certain clothing items.

Training

While it was acknowledged that Positive Space signs are becoming more common in Hamilton, there were questions as to whether their presence reflected LGBTQ+ affirming practices. Participants believed that more work needs to be done in training the public about LGBTQ+ topics. While the general sense was that more and better training should be available to everyone, there are specific groups that should be

targeted: health care providers, frontline support workers, police officers, teachers, parents, foster homes, long-term care providers and businesses. Training could be improved by providing more thorough trans-specific education and discussing intersectionality. An intersectional analysis would contribute to understanding the LGBTQ+ community as a variety of lived experiences, encompassing people of colour, people who are differently abled, newcomers to Canada, those who are experiencing low income or others living with additional circumstances and identities.

4.3 Mural Activity Conclusion

The mural activity helped set the stage for topics of discussion at the focus group tables by illuminating assets and needs based on the experiences of those present from Hamilton's LGBTQ+ community and allies.

Assets

In asking, "What makes Hamilton a great place to live, work, play and learn," participants were given an open-ended opportunity to identify the key assets in Hamilton for LGBTQ+ people from their experience or knowledge as either members of the community or allies. This was not a strict quantitative exercise so there is no exact ranking to the order. The following make up the main topics identified as asset areas and align closely to the pre-chosen topics for the focus group conversations where more specific information was gathered. Some are grouped together if the number of responses received was sparse.

- Safety
- Support Services
- Education
- Health care/Housing/Income
- Community

Gaps

In asking, "What would make Hamilton a great place to live, work, play and learn," participants were given an open-ended opportunity to identify the key gaps in Hamilton for LGBTQ+ people from their experience or knowledge as either members of the community or allies. This was not a strict quantitative exercise so, as with the assets identified above, there is no exact ranking to the order. The following make up the main topics identified as areas with gaps and align closely to the pre-chosen topics for the focus group conversations where more specific information was gathered. Almost twice as many gaps were clearly identified compared to that in the asset area.

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| • Community Centre | • Education |
| • Community/Recreation | • Employment/Income |
| • Health care | • Housing |
| • Support Services | • Safety |
| • Training | |

5.0 Table Conversations

Once the participants in the large group had answered the first general questions using the mural as a backdrop, they chose or were sometimes assigned tables to balance the numbers if people were comfortable with switching. Each table discussed one of six topics using the basic premise for the question with the mural activity. The six topics were: health care, education, housing, recreation, support services, and social.

The questions used to discuss each topic were:

- 1) What makes Hamilton a good place for _____ (LGBTQ+ youth, Trans people, older LGBTQ+ adults, all LGBTQ+ people) when it comes to _____ (healthcare, education, housing, recreation, support services, and social)
- 2)
- 3) What would make Hamilton a better place for _____ (LGBTQ+ youth, Trans people, older LGBTQ+ adults, all LGBTQ+ people) when it comes to _____ (healthcare, education, housing, recreation, support services, and social).

The following sections outline the results of the table conversations according to each of the community consultation sessions in sequential order.

5.1 Trans Community Consultation

Introduction

The Trans community consultation was held on February 3rd, 2016. 16 people completed registration, signing in for the evening, however there were more individuals that attended. Other participants attended but elected to remain anonymous. Approximately eight attendees were service providers or allies (four registered) and their feedback is recorded separately.

Susan Gapka was the guest speaker for the evening. Susan is a transgender and mental health activist based in Toronto, known for her advocacy work that successfully reinstated funding for gender-affirming surgery in Ontario. To open the consultation, she spoke about the discrimination faced by trans populations, especially related to housing, employment, and violence. Susan articulated many of the physical and mental health consequences these experiences can lead to for trans people and called for more trans-positive services in the area as a response. She referred to the services available in Toronto as inspiration for what can occur in Hamilton, acknowledging the necessity for trans people and allies to advocate for these changes together moving forward.

Health care

The largest area of discussion revolved around the topic of health. Trans people have unique intersections with health services as compared to both the general population as well as other LGBTQ+ community members. Participants who had been able to find

responsive and respectful health care providers were viewed as “lucky” because that is not the predominant experience. Trans community members identified Dr. Massarella as a major asset to the health care field, naming her and McMaster Family Practice as the best options for trans folks. Other positive experiences were discussed in relation to Dr. Risdon, Youth Wellness Centre, Quest, and community health centres. What made this feel helpful for trans people were knowledgeable practitioners, friendly spaces, and trans-specific care.

Participants also mentioned the TransLine resource, a phone line through which medical professionals can receive information and advice about providing health care to trans patients. The overarching feeling was that there is really no reason for health care providers to be unable to provide trans-affirming services to their patients because training and resources are available.

The reality for most trans Hamiltonians is that local, trans-affirming health care is hard to find. Several participants mentioned seeking health services outside of Hamilton in order to meet their needs. Regardless, long waitlists can be an issue. When seeking health services, many trans participants spoke about frontline staff’s inability to provide appropriate referrals due to lack of knowledge about LGBTQ+ services in the community. Others shared concerns about medical professionals attempting to treat trans patients without a complete understanding of best practices. For example, two participants spoke about how certain dosages of hormones could lead to long-term health issues if not prescribed carefully.

Service providers who attended the trans consultation spoke about challenges for trans folks when filling out forms in a health care setting, noting that standardized forms are generally not inclusive of all genders and do not respectfully facilitate coming out processes. They shared observations related to trans people having to constantly educate health providers and advocate for themselves. Acknowledgement of intersecting identities also took place. Service providers named the health care system’s inability to provide appropriate support for trans individuals also experiencing physical or mental health needs.

***“We shouldn’t have to be afraid
to go to the hospital when we need to.”***

Trans participant

Safety

Fear and experiences of discrimination were a common theme throughout all topics discussed at the trans community consultation. Safety concerns in public spaces were expressed related to using public transit, experiencing sexual harassment, navigating city streets after dark, and, most commonly, accessing washrooms and change rooms. Since washrooms and change rooms tend to be gender-segregated, trans people can face judgment, harassment, or violence if they do not “pass” in these spaces.

Both trans participants and service providers agreed that lack of trans-friendly washroom and change room options lead to feelings of being unwelcome or realities of being unsafe for trans folks.

Similar fears of discrimination permeated all areas of trans people's lives. In educational systems, at places of work, navigating housing options, and accessing support services all present situations in which trans community members face persistent transphobia and cissexism. At schools, struggles can be encountered with teachers and peers during transition. Trans youth can feel expected to educate their educators and correct everyone around them each time a misgendering occurs or a cissexist statement is made. Service Providers at the consultation noted that LGBTQ+ initiatives at schools, such as Positive Space Groups, are not specific to the unique needs of trans youth.

“People will talk about my genitalia, that’s sexual harassment. People don’t know that.” Trans participant

Employment/Income

When employed or seeking employment, trans community members experience and fear discrimination due to their trans status. At the consultation, participants advised each other to document every behaviour of their employers, expecting interactions with human resources departments and potentially the Ontario Human Rights Commission. This is the reality of workplaces for trans folks, if they are hired at all in the first place. Being unable to find work due to being trans and facing income insecurity result in significant impacts on daily life for trans community members. Service providers agreed that financial barriers could impact trans people's lives such as by excluding them from social opportunities and limiting access to clothing, binders, or other accessories needing during transition.

Housing

Housing is another area of life that is affected for the trans community. In general, people experience challenges with social housing in Hamilton, with some units being vacant, in disrepair, inaccessible, or unavailable due to strict eligibility requirements. For trans people in particular, the added complication is that housing may be unsafe or precarious due to landlord beliefs and behaviours. Transitioning while renting may be dangerous because of landlords expecting tenants to identify as one gender and present themselves accordingly. Trans folks experience being misgendered by landlords or held to a fictional gender binary. They experience discrimination when applying for housing or filling out paperwork that does not represent their gender identities. The fear and reality of evictions are present for trans community members, resulting in precarious housing situations that put all other aspects of their lives at risk as well.

Support Services

The trans group identified Willow's Place as a trans-positive space, and also acknowledged a parent support group, youth support group, a trans support group,

and a trans-friendly swim at the YWCA that operate locally. A trans-specific support line was also mentioned as a great resource. Trans participants spoke about gaps in service, but also named Good Shepherd as a service that has taken the initiative to provide more services and spaces for trans folks.

Despite the existence of these services, the clear consensus at the trans consultation was that more trans-specific services are needed in Hamilton. Trans people find themselves seeking services outside the city, if it is accessible for them to do so, but ultimately feel more local options are necessary. Specifically, challenges arise when trans community members seek shelter services. Both transmasculine and transfeminine individuals identified shelters as inaccessible based on their trans status. Existing barriers include long wait lists or high turn away rates, uncertainty about which gender-segregated service is most applicable for their needs, wanting to pass while in shelter, and lack of access to binders to help in those situations.

Trans participants spoke about the need for more counselling for the trans community, more youth services, housing supports, mental health services, and social opportunities. The feeling was that these options could be housed under a one-stop-shop model of service delivery. There was a clear desire for a centralized service that can provide information, referrals, social services, and activities to reduce social isolation all under one roof. In addition, trans folks wanted this kind of information to be available online and kept up-to-date so that people can find what they need. The consensus that these types of services should be run by a stable body and provided with stable funding.

Training

It is important for trans people to feel that the spaces they are walking into will be affirming for them and their needs. Identified by both the trans community and service provider discussion groups, the presence of Positive Space signs or rainbow flags do not always guarantee this in practice. Trans folks need all service providers in their lives to be trans-affirming, which is a skill set that is often beyond the scope of a single Positive Space training session. Without this, the burden of education is placed on trans individuals to inform the professionals in their lives about trans issues. This unfairly expects trans people to speak on behalf of the entire trans population, know answers to questions they themselves are asking of professionals, or constantly reiterate the same lessons when encountering new people.

Training needs to encompass greater trans-positivity, be more widely available, and be considered mandatory, especially for professionals commonly in positions to support trans people. Trans-affirming symbols need to be used to signal safety for trans folks and enforced through ongoing training and the implementation of actual positive policies and practices. Service providers felt that agencies' missions, visions, and values should state explicit commitment to being trans-inclusive. Entire spaces and staff teams must be trained and able to carry out these policies in their practice. Trans support must be unambiguous and visible, so that it is clear to trans people as well as all others, that trans people's rights and needs are valued in society.

5.2 Key Findings

1. There is an expressed need for local physical and mental health care options tailored to trans people's needs.
2. Trans people experience discrimination, harassment, and violence in their lives, resulting in the need for more trans-inclusive training for public service employees.
3. More trans-specific support services, ideally staffed by trans people, are needed to respond to the unique needs of trans people in Hamilton, including phone lines, counselling, shelters, mental health services, and recreational opportunities.

5.3 LGBTQ+ Older Adults Community Consultation

Introduction

The LGBTQ+ older adults community consultation session was held on February 11, 2016. 9 participants signed in for registration while others decline to sign in wanting to remain anonymous for various reasons. The choice to hold the consultation in a seniors building was to increase the accessibility for seniors to participate in the consultation session. Individuals 55 and over were welcomed to attend to provide their unique and diverse experiences as LGBTQ+ older adults.

The LGBTQ+ older adults community consultation session began with two guest speakers, Bernadine Thompson and Tim McClemont, to speak in order to provide context for the session.

Bernadine is an active member of the Hamilton community, participating in 5km races to raise money for local charities and engaging with church groups. During the consultation with older adults, she shared information about the frustrations and discrimination she has experienced with the coming out process every time she accesses community programs. This includes having to come out to food banks, housing providers, health care services, and recreational programs. Bernadine emphasized a greater need for services that are LGBTQ+ inclusive, communication between LGBTQ+ safe spaces and programs that are more accessible, physically and financially. These are common concerns for the older LGBTQ+ population.

Tim is the Executive Director of the AIDS Network, which provides AIDS prevention, education, and support services to the Hamilton, Halton, Haldimand, Norfolk, and Brant areas. He has a long history with Hamilton and views it as a community able to embrace its LGBTQ+ members, citing its diversity, social opportunities, and political activist roots. He acknowledged the need for services to break out of their silos and collaborate more responsively to the needs of LGBTQ + people.

Community, Recreation & Social Inclusion

Community-based programs were identified within the community that is LGBTQ+ friendly such as, Bingo, bowling leagues, social clubs, pool teams, chorus groups and coffee groups. Some of the groups were gender specific, offering social engagement and support for gay or lesbian identified individuals. Although there are many great programs there are still experiences of social isolation for older LGBTQ+ people.

A large area of discussion occurred in relation to living in Hamilton as an aging LGBTQ+ individual and the lack of social inclusion, socially promoted, inclusive programs and services geared specifically to the aging population. A significant area of conversation surrounded the recommendation and need, for a community hub or centre, focused on addressing and supporting the needs of the LGBTQ+ population, in collaboration with an age-specific lens. A significant barrier that was expressed by the group was the increased need for internet access. This presented as a compound barrier for the older LGBTQ+ population due to the financial limitations experienced by the specific population and the lack of experience in utilizing the internet. It was discussed that this presents an age-specific barrier and has limited the access that older LGBTQ+ people have in learning about resources, services and connecting with the community. Older adults expressed a desire for social spaces and events that were not associated with either bars or religious space. Traditional social spaces for LGBTQ+ populations have been relegated to bars or clubs, however, this does not reflect the varying interests of the LGBTQ+ population, preferring something more neutral such as a coffee shop. A greater sense of community was expressed in wanting to be created, not only for the aging population but also to support and incorporate the younger LGBTQ+ population.

Community Centre

In collaboration with more inclusive and LGBTQ+ friendly spaces, a Community Centre was proposed as a needed resource. The Community Centre would act as a bridge for the gap in the community, services and positive space inclusion for the LGBTQ+ people.

The community centre generated a significant portion of the conversation and highlighted an underlying need and desire for LGBTQ+ people to have a safe, inclusive and welcoming community in which they felt their needs were specifically addressed. This development of a sense of community is key in supporting LGBTQ+ individuals in experiencing equal rights to belong, thrive and prosper in the City of Hamilton. The community centre would work to be an inclusive hub that would assist LGBTQ+ individuals from different age groups, from young to elderly. Space would provide an opportunity for social gatherings to occur in order to greater strengthen and foster experiences of community. The Community Centre would be an LGBTQ+ space with space and programming that is specifically targeted to the senior population. This would seek to develop and foster inclusivity while addressing the diversity between populations, as some senior identify different barriers in accessing services such as the increased use of electronics and internet.

“There is a need for communication between groups, space or hub to bring people together.” Older adult participant

The community centre is proposed to act as a hub for LGBTQ+ individuals, a resource where they can experience community, access supports, support each other and develop a concrete and lasting historical space for future LGBTQ+ members. It was acknowledged that there currently is no designated space that holds the history of the LGBTQ+ populations. There is historical value that can be provided to current and future LGBTQ+ populations. This would also be available to the general public in order to increase education and awareness about the LGBTQ+ population.

Funding for the community centre was discussed. It was suggested that the LGBTQ+ community centre be funded with an administrative infrastructure established. Ideas were to approach the City of Hamilton or Public Health. Potential avenues of partnership. The few LGBTQ+ specific services that currently exist are often volunteer-run, making them potentially unsustainable over the long-term. A formal structure where services can be maintained, through consistent funding and staffing would be ideal. In addition to validating the need for LGBTQ+ visibility in the community at large. Making a central hub would coordinate communication about LGBTQ+ events and programming. Advertising and promotion could then be undertaken more consistently and given the resources needed to ensure that the public knows about available programming.

LGBTQ+ History

LGBTQ+ older adults recommended the community centre was out of the desire to connect with people of different ages and develop communication between generations. It was discussed that there is a lack of LGBTQ+ focused history available to the LGBTQ+ youth and larger population. The older LGBTQ+ population wanted to be able to share their histories and experiences, as well, as hear the experiences of the younger LGBTQ+ populations. Within the community space, it was proposed to have space dedicated to the history and memorabilia of the LGBTQ+ population. This would increase access to the histories of LGBTQ+ people and also act as an educational tool for LGBTQ+ generations and the public.

Health Care

Access to LGBTQ+ affirming health care was a topic of importance for older adults. Discussions included positive experiences in some settings such as McMaster Family Health Team, Stone Church Medical Centre, Canadian Mental Health Association and the Screen for Life coach. The reasons these health care options were named as positives is that some have specialized care for people who are trans, provide services that use affirming language and, are staffed by professionals who are LGBTQ+.

Older adults expressed a desire for this level of care to follow them into all health settings they encounter, as they age. There are concerns that Long-Term Care facilities and retirement homes are not prepared to support queer individuals and couples in residential settings. Some people shared experiences of couples being separated in Long-Term Care homes, not being permitted to show affection for one another or going

back into the closet to avoid discrimination. The level of acceptance could depend on the staff members working at times, leading to a spectrum of experiences from discrimination to acceptance. There is a constant burden of having to out themselves to health care providers while being uncertain about how that will impact the level of care they receive. Consistent LGBTQ+ affirming care for the aging is especially needed. There was concern of the lack of policies that focus on inclusion in relation of LGBTQ+ identities in service delivery at Long-Term Care settings and additional concerns about how residents with HIV would be treated. Beyond their experiences as they age, participants shared general feedback about being discriminated against by health care professional based on their LGBTQ+ identity. They discussed wanting to have a list of doctors that are supportive and local, rather than going to Toronto or elsewhere in order to find inclusive doctors.

Older adults expressed a clear demand that local health care for the aging begins to respond by providing Positive Space training to all staff, leading the creation of strong policies and practices for inclusivity and safety of LGBTQ+ people. Training should be made mandatory, especially for Long-Term Care facilities. This would contribute to people feeling safer and more accommodated when seeking health supports as they age. In addition, it relocates the burden of education about LGBTQ+ topics off of individuals and onto professions and their organizations.

Social Services

The YWCA was the only service provider identified as being an inclusive and trans-friendly space that offered elderly specific programs.

Social services were identified as being a resource that is lacking in the practice of connecting with the aging population. A large gap in service involved end of life planning for the aging LGBTQ+ population. This is a distinct service needed for the aging LGBTQ+ population. Furthermore, addressing the diversity and complexities that are faced by the LGBTQ+ population in being recognized as lifetime partners.

“Assumptions that gay stuff is young stuff.” Older adult participant

Services also need to be non-affiliated with religious groups and outside of churches as these have had long, negative, histories for some LGBTQ+ people. A neutral space is called for by the LGBTQ+ senior population in order to best support their needs. A reoccurring theme within the discussion centered around the continuous and repeated need for LGBTQ+ people to come out when accessing services, particularly in relation to medical, housing and social services. Older adults also identified wanting support services that are geared towards grief counselling, domestic violence, and legal services. These were areas that were identified as having gaps for serving the LGBTQ+ population.

Training

The session conversation included the need and value for the training of various sectors in Hamilton. This included services such as Residential Care Facilities, Long-Term Care facilities, health care providers, police services and social services.

It was clearly expressed that an age-specific response is needed when considering the different capacities, organizations, and services that engage with the older LGBTQ+ population. Training needs to be geared at better understanding, through the use of education, the barriers that are faced by the aging LGBTQ+ population. This needs to go beyond Positive Space Training, as it may be too general and does not reflect the unique needs of seniors. The process of training and education around LGBTQ+ populations need to be continual and evolving, as the unique needs and experiences of the LGBTQ+ population continue to evolve.

“Positive Space Training can only be the beginning. It must be an on-going process.” Older adult participant

Housing

Housing was a positive experience for some LGBTQ+ participants. Participants gave some examples of particular housing areas of apartment buildings (e.g. 17 Robinson St.), recognized as a positive space or good building. The cost of housing was considered to be relatively affordable, however, increasing housing prices has the potential to drastically impact this. When compared to Toronto, housing in Hamilton is viewed as much more affordable.

Housing for the older LGBTQ+ population was discussed, recognizing the lack of affordable or accessible housing options. Discrimination and oppression were experiences that participants identified when engaging with housing services such as City Housing, in nursing homes and retirement facilities. The length of City Housing waiting lists and the quality of housing units were also recognized as an area that needs more development and support.

Possible solutions were put forward that seeks to see the development of an inclusive and LGBTQ+ focused living space, increasing experiences of inclusivity and safety. The LGBTQ+ living space would seek to close the gap of social isolation and discrimination while reducing the experiences of bias. Fostering a strengthened community experience of LGBTQ+ people.

5.4 Key Findings

1. The older LGBTQ+ population has different and unique needs than the overall LGBTQ+ population, this includes areas of life such as legitimacy of being recognized as a lifetime partner, being re-closeted and barriers to accessing services due to the increasing use digital media.

2. An LGBTQ+ community centre was identified as a response to the need for centralized LGBTQ+ information, support services, and social events. Emphasis on physical and financial accessibility needs to remain as a primary focus for making the community centre accessible and inclusive.
3. Compiling and displaying an archive of local LGBTQ+ history is key to preserving the history of the community, sharing stories among generations, and working together moving forward.

5.5 Youth Community Consultation

Introduction

The Youth Consultation session was held on February 23rd, 2016 at Good Shepherd Square. 26 participants signed the registration however, some participants chose not to sign in wanting to remain anonymous. The age range on the invitation to potential participants was given as 12 - 30, though there may have been some who attended who were slightly outside this range. Outreach to connect with youth participants was through Good Shepherd, the Queer Youth Planning Collaborative, and through social media.

Guest speaker, Jackson Gates, is a gay male living in Hamilton, pursuing social service work, and sharing his story in order to make changes to the way youth systems support young queer and trans people. Jackson spoke about his experiences of homophobia, assumptions, and discrimination by the child welfare system, foster homes, and police services. He passionately advocated for better training for service providers, designated LGBTQ+ friendly youth spaces, and more visibility in the community through activities like Pride.

To speak about his experiences as a young trans guy, Benjamin Levi, joined the consultation to share what it's like to navigate the medical and educational systems. He brought up challenges in communicating with doctors about his needs, often having to inform them of best practices and courses of action. Benjamin also highlighted the need for educators to become more educated on how to create safe learning environments for queer and trans young people. As it stands, he believes the burden is on youth to educate the educators, when they are supposed to be the ones receiving support.

Health Care

LGBTQ+ youth identified that the health care system plays a pivotal role in the experiences of inclusivity, accessibility, and support. The healthcare system and service providers have been identified as having some positives but with a large area of needed improvement. Services that are inclusive and accessible were dominant in the conversation, with doctor training being considered a central component. Educating doctors on LGBTQ+ specific health supports were identified as an opportunity to further support the needs of LGBTQ+ youth by enhancing the experiences of care provided.

Currently, doctor's education of the diverse and unique needs of the LGBTQ+ population is not sufficient and as a result, impacts the appropriate health referrals and services that LGBTQ+ youth are provided. This included the influence of bias by doctors that youth are unable to understand or determine their sexual orientation or gender identity due to their age.

Youth offered proposed solutions by suggesting that Positive Space training be provided to doctors and in order to support youth, stickers displaying the Positive Space training be displayed. This would help with doctors having more understanding of the diversity of LGBTQ+ populations, enhance inclusivity and take away the guesswork that LGBTQ+ individuals have to go through when seeking a healthcare practitioner.

“You’re way too young to be thinking about that.”

Doctor's response to a youth participant coming out

Another area of development that was identified is the need for more local services. Services relating to the needs of LGBTQ+ youth can be high in cost, out of city and inaccessible by local transit. This presents a significant barrier for LGBTQ+ youth in engaging positively with the healthcare system. Localizing services would be a way to reduce this barrier and better support LGBTQ+ youth.

When considering local Public Health, participants expressed that these views contribute to the way that Public Health initiatives and education are run for youth. More inclusive campaigns and education tools were highlighted as a need for public health workers and within service. Emphasis on sex-positive language and supports including, free and varied contraception were identified as needs within Hamilton Public Health.

Education

Youth noted that there are some safe(r) spaces within the Hamilton education system. These experiences of safety varied from different age levels. Youths identified, at the high school level, The Hamilton Wentworth District Board's Positive Space group and events such as “Rainbow Prom” and “Day of Difference” which were positive experiences. These groups offered experiences of inclusivity, mentorship, support and advocacy potential. These groups also offered an opportunity for students be open with their identity, an experience that is not uniform within the rest of the school environment.

There are gaps in the education system that were identified by LGBTQ+ youth specifically towards the lack of representation and educational opportunities in relation to history. Some students identified needing to engage in self-learning in order to meet their educational needs which are largely informed by friends, particularly around health and sexual health, rather than the schools. Within the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District school board, health classes offered no engagement with LGBTQ+ experiences and needs.

“How do you get an education when you’re educating the educators?”

Youth participant

Youth identified that positive space groups are a way to create spaces that are free of judgment and offer an opportunity to increase awareness and education about the LGBTQ+ population. However, these spaces need to be engaged with by the broader school system as there is potential for them to further experiences of isolation and difference from the larger school community. More inclusive, positive space school-wide events are needed to better integrate the needs of the LGBTQ+ population and to combat stigma, misinformation, discrimination and social isolation.

Youth participants also noted that, at the high school level, there needs to be a greater incorporation of resources within the broader school community. Through the group discussions it was identified that greater connection with LGBTQ+ supports at the post-secondary level to the larger community, particularly the downtown Hamilton community is needed. LGBTQ+ supports on campus at McMaster have been viewed as difficult to integrate. Greater connection and support, such as collaboration with McMaster and Mohawk were viewed as offering an important and supportive role for community connections.

Housing

Housing was viewed in two perspectives. Housing was identified to be lacking in the Hamilton area that was supportive and inclusive of LGBTQ+ youth but also recognized as being more affordable when compared to areas such as Toronto or Mississauga. Housing in Hamilton is viewed as inaccessible due to the increasing lack of affordable housing. This lack of housing accessibility is then compounded by experiences of discrimination from landlords due to potential tenants being LGBTQ+. Discrimination was heavily discussed in terms of housing and acted as a significant barrier to finding and securing housing that is stable and safe.

Areas of concern were discussed by the group developing a focus on the experiences of discrimination by landlords and roommates. Participants reported that there is difficulty in navigating how to work with landlords, as there have been experiences of discrimination towards queer and trans youth. This experience can be discouraging when looking for a place to live.

Emphasis was put forward on the need to increase training for housing workers and landlords. Regular community meetings that would offer resources for landlords, such as a "Pride Guide" were suggested. Youth identified that a Safe Space list of landlords would also benefit as this would take away the anxiety of having to constantly retell their stories and reduce fears of being discriminated against by landlords due to being LGBTQ+. More education and training for housing workers about bylaws and Human Rights Code were also discussed as being resources to support LGBTQ+ youth in having greater access to housing.

Affordability was a large concern when discussing housing with LGBTQ+ youth. Participants shared that they are experiencing less available housing, with prices being inflated once a current tenant leaves. Housing costs are sometimes mitigated through the use of roommates but LGBTQ+ youth noted that this is not an option that is always

available to them. The option of a roommate is not always easily accessible as tensions are experienced around being LGBTQ+, resulting in experiences of homophobia or heteronormative practices that have negative impacts on the living environment. This highlights the need for investment in long-term, affordable and safe, housing options for LGBTQ+ populations with an added focus on providing housing that specifically supports the needs of LGBTQ+ youth.

“It’s hard to look for another place to live. You have to talk to people and tell your story. You have to tell your story every time. You don’t know if they are going to discriminate against you for being LGBTQ+.” Youth participant

Support Service

Within support services in Hamilton queer visibility is growing. While there are no LGBTQ+ specific organizations, varying community agencies have adopted queer-friendly programming. Organizations that have expressed commitment to being LGBTQ+ inclusive with their programming include, SACHA, Youth Wellness Centre, NGEN, Good Shepherd, and Routes Youth Centre. SACHA and NGEN are noted as being organizations that are LGBTQ+ friendly and supportive, Youth Wellness is noted as being inclusive, respectful of pronouns and offering gender-neutral bathrooms. RADAR, previously offered by The Well, continues to offer a drop-in centre for LGBTQ+ youth. Routes, in Dundas, offers free counselling and LGBTQ+ specific weekly meetings.

Visibility within community agencies is also increasing, seen through an increase in Positive Space stickers, as well as with more roles existing in agencies that are geared towards service providers with lived experience in the LGBTQ+ community. While some community agencies have attempted to be inclusive of their existing services for LGBTQ+ youth, there is still a distinct gap in specific services for youth in Hamilton.

“Everyone should know about LGBTQ+ services, even if they’re straight.”
Youth participant

These gaps in services have impacts on the lives of LGBTQ+ youth, with some identifying that leaving the Hamilton is a reality they must consider in order to access services that best meet their needs. A large gap in service relates to how and what knowledge is shared with LGBTQ+ youth about what services are available. Services are experienced as being inaccessible and hard to find for LGBTQ+ youth. Discussions developed around the availability and accessibility of counselling services for LGBTQ+ youth with barriers being identified in relation to wait lists, the cost for service and length of time that services are offered. Youth recognized that in order to access services sometimes they had to seek services with religious affiliation which can increase the risk of biased services. The gaps in available local services subsequently affect community ties that LGBTQ+ youth experience within Hamilton.

“I don’t want to leave my hometown, but the services in Toronto for trans youth are much better.” Youth participant

Youth participants identified that there is a need for resources such as a hotline to support LGBTQ+ youth, however, expanding this service to an online resource was identified as being more beneficial. Youth identified that they might not have privacy to speak freely on the phone without having someone overhear them and this can act as a barrier to accessing support services.

Support services such as an LGBTQ+ youth specific shelter is lacking, which leaves some youths in very vulnerable situations. The only trans-specific youth shelter is in Toronto, requiring youth to leave the city to seek emergency services. Group home services are also divided by gender which impacts the experiences of exclusivity, particularly for trans youth as staff do not always know how to best support their needs.

“We should have an LGBTQ+ shelter for youth. That would be great.”

Youth participant

Participants explored the types of services that are needed within Hamilton in order to limit existing barriers. These supports would include a drop-in centre, workshops, better mental health services, more counselling services, services that are specifically geared to LGBTQ+ needs offering support around “coming out”, which requires specific training to adequately offer support.

Community Centre

The lack of a dedicated community centre, focusing on the needs of LGBTQ+ individuals were the greatest concern amongst youth participants. Youth strongly identified the lack of a community centre as being in the city of Hamilton. The Well, a community centre and resource had been reflected on as being very beneficial and positive, however, it’s closure has left an increasing gap in services for LGBTQ+ youth in Hamilton.

“When you google LGBTQ+ Hamilton, you get The Well website which is no longer around.” Youth participant

A community centre for LGBTQ+ populations, with a focus on youth, would offer a sense of connection to the community, increase the availability of resources, offer peer support through connection and act as a way to increase LGBTQ+ visibility within the larger Hamilton community. Supporting the needs of the LGBTQ+ youth population would involve offering social groups in a physical space that is safe, inclusive, offers drop-in services as well as planned programming.

Youth identified wanting an organization to take on the role of providing services to support meeting basic needs such as access to laundry services, bus tickets, an eating space and lounge area. The physical identity of the building was also discussed, addressing the sensitivity that needs to be provided for youth that might seek to access the space but may not have come out to their social circles. Ensuring that the physical building looks general and does not inadvertently “out” anyone seeking to access services was viewed as being very important in making the space safe.

Participants also expressed a desire for volunteer opportunities and student placements in the space in order to enhance the connection with LGBTQ+ youth and provide more diverse opportunities for learning and help to create employment opportunities.

Social/Recreation

Inclusive and LGBTQ+ specific social options for youth within Hamilton were stated by participants as getting better. The YWCA and Cedar Lodge Campground, were specific organizations identified as providing recreational activities for LGBTQ+ youth with activities such as a trans swim. McMaster was noted as for advertising their sports centre as being inclusive, and through the recreational activities that the Queer Student Community Centre runs through the McMaster Student Union. Events, such as Art Crawl and the Hamilton Pride Parade, both within the James Street North area were identified as having a positive queer visibility and providing a queer-friendly atmosphere.

Social events such as Rainbow Prom were recognized as being amazing nights, at a cost-effective price. Steel Lounge (now closed) and Café Oranje are public spaces that were also identified as being queer-friendly and inclusive, largely associated with being queer owned. Nightclubs were also viewed as offering positive experiences but also recognized that this is not an inclusive resource for some youth. Having diverse programming and community social options that are inclusive of all ages, are non-sexualized and are establishments that are not based around alcohol consumption was discussed of being of value, in order to strengthen community and social opportunities.

The Rainbow Café was presented as an opportunity to fulfill this need as it would help parents feel safe and comfortable knowing their LGBTQ+ youths have a space that they can go to that is inclusive. The focus would be to offer a safe and inclusive environment that youths could attend and would support parents in feeling secure about their youths attending social events in the community. Other proposed events were queer movie nights, which would provide an alternative to Hamilton movie theatres that have gendered washrooms, which can create a barrier for trans youth seeking social activities.

Communicating that recreation opportunities exist for youth is important in creating access to them and can be done through networking between groups and the use of social media. Social media was also recognized as creating “hangout” opportunities in itself that differ from the physical space that exists. Online resources, particularly through the City of Hamilton website, would help for awareness of events. Participants stated that they have not heard about any LGBTQ+ specific recreation, but questions whether there are no activities or if the information is not being shared with the community in an accessible way.

A greater diversity of activities that foster connection and community were expressed, noting that family-friendly activities are lacking. A need for more active events such as hiking, camping swimming and gyms are needed to support the diverse interests of LGBTQ+ youth and their families.

Training

Participants noted that there is an increasingly visible display of Positive Space stickers in more organizations, noting that staff are being trained in Positive Space. These stickers are reflective of a building allyship of those that work within the agencies.

However, there is still an expressed need for more systemic, citywide and agency-wide training to educate employees, with specific areas of service noted needing continual training, specifically when working with youth. The Catholic Children's Aid Society and the Children's Aid Society receive training but there was a lack of continual training provided, which is needed when working with children in the child welfare system. Safe foster homes for LGBTQ+ youth were also considered an issue as some participants noted a lack of training for foster parents. Youth also reported that there have been instances of police mistreating LGBTQ+ individuals in domestic violence situations. Safety was considered a concern when police are working with LGBTQ+ individuals and couples due to this lack of training.

Safety

Safety concerns were expressed by youth to be present in many public spaces, particularly in downtown Hamilton. These spaces include when using public transit, being in the "wrong" section of stores based on perceived gender, filling out forms that do not acknowledge gender binary and using changing rooms. There is concern that due to a lack of education geared to the general public, LGBTQ+ youth are at continued risk of homophobia-based violence in public spaces. Within the City of Hamilton, it was identified that there is a lack of diversity in representation on public council, with no human rights council ensuring inclusivity for the many groups that live in Hamilton. Representation amongst these areas of municipal government would help create and support safe and inclusive policies, practices and place within the city.

"Downtown Hamilton is dangerous." Youth participant

Income and Employment

It was identified by the youth participants, that there is a need for more accessible youth-focused employment opportunities for the LGBTQ+ youth population. A higher employment rate is needed, with a greater focus on employment that is beyond "working class" jobs. Access to necessities such as binders also needs to be more available, as they are hard to find, expensive and only available online.

Other

Hamilton is viewed, by the participants, as having an opportunity to grow and develop. It was viewed that Hamilton's community development is more likely, manageable and impactful when compared to Toronto. It was optimistically discussed that Hamilton has the potential to change and improve the sense of community and inclusion experienced by LGBTQ+ population. Hamilton feels less anonymous, by participants, when compared with Toronto and boost positives such as an art scene and lots of green space. These were positives that were viewed in relation to living in Hamilton and resources that can be utilized for improving aspects of the community.

However, concerns were discussed regarding the impact that gentrification is having on the Hamilton community, resulting in an added barrier for the LGBTQ+ populations.

5.6 Key Findings

1. LGBTQ+ youth must have access to local health care providers, equipped to offer LGBTQ+ inclusive treatment. This includes appropriate referral and information related to sexual health, transitioning, and mental health.
2. Youth need educators at all levels, to interrupt homophobia and transphobia at school, facilitate Positive Space groups, and be able to discuss LGBTQ+ topics in order to remove the burden from queer and trans students. More recognition within the health and history curriculums is needed in order to foster inclusive and representative education, reduce bias and discrimination.
3. Training for service providers, in multiple sectors, is needed and must be continual. One-time training is not sufficient enough to support the diversity of the LGBTQ+ population and numerous of barriers that are faced. Training staff about LGBTQ+ issues helps to better support LGBTQ+ individuals, making services more accessible, inclusive and safe.
4. A financially-accessible, alcohol free community centre was identified as necessary, to meet the needs of the LGBTQ+ youth population. A community centre was proposed to support this need that offers counselling services, social opportunities and support groups.

5.7 Parent Community Consultation

Introduction

The Parents Community Consultation was held at the Good Shepherd Square in Hamilton. 13 parents signed the registration sheet, however, more attended with some wanting to remain anonymous. Some participants chose not to sign in wanting to maintain anonymous.

Guest speakers, Heather Mackenzie works for the Catholic Children's Aid and is a lesbian parent in Hamilton. She opened the consultation by acknowledging the lack of services for queer or trans parents and parents of queer or trans kids which she has experienced as a lonely struggle. Heather pointed to some efforts of daycares and schools to be inclusive, but ultimately feels she has to be a trailblazer through each institution, providing education and feedback about how to be more truly inclusive. She has advocated for more concrete actions to increase inclusivity and safety for queer families and queer kids in schools and daycares. As well as more opportunities for families to connect to reduce social isolation.

Participants within the Parents consultation consisted of parents who identify as LGBTQ+, and parents of LGBTQ+ children. There were two guest speakers that participated in the consultation who are parents within the LGBTQ+ community.

Health Care

Health care was discussed, noting positive and negative experiences. Parents identified that there are some community health services that seek to be inclusive of the needs of the LGBTQ+ populations, noting the Hamilton Urban Core, McMaster Family Health Team, and North Hamilton Community Centre. The North Hamilton Community Centre was identified as trying to create positive space within their social work, psychiatry, family doctors and various health services. A positive experience discussed by an individual participant included having a doctor who sent all her staff to training through Rainbow Health and did not display Positive Space poster acknowledgments until all staff had been trained. Dr. Johnson, from McMaster, was noted for trying to create a trans youth clinic. Further, an experience at a fertility clinic in Burlington was cited as being phenomenal, with an acknowledgment that the Hamilton location of the clinic was known to a good resource as well. Barriers associated with health services in Hamilton were identified as the largest barrier or gap in service. Access to inclusive health services that are knowledgeable of the specific needs and providing the supports the LGBTQ+ populations require is identified as being a large barrier. Services are either not well equipped to deal with these specific needs, are not advertised well or are difficult to find. Many resources require LGBTQ+ individuals to go out of the local, Hamilton, area which increases costs due to travel.

Education

Conversation surrounded the experiences of children and parents and their experiences and interactions with the local school system. The Hamilton Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) was expressed as having many positives, with elementary schools seeking to offer inclusivity and recognition of LGBTQ+ families by providing positive spaces and experiences. Strathcona, Ryerson, and Earl Kitchener were the primary schools identified. Recognition was also paid to HWDSB parent support groups and the HWDSBs SAGE program. Some parents recognized they had positive experiences with teachers that had been educated on LGBTQ+ parenting. An experience that was positive and shared, included a teacher that identifies as lesbian using “Pink Shirt” Day, aimed at anti-bullying to speak to homophobia and transphobia. Participants reflected that all educators should be trained on inclusivity, language terms and how to facilitate enjoyable experiences for LGBTQ+ children and children of LGBTQ+ parents. Training should be mandatory, on-going and occur at every level of the schooling system, including daycare, elementary and secondary schools.

Although there are acknowledgments of schools trying to offer inclusivity there are still experiences of difference reported by parents and children of LGBTQ+ families. These differences are connected with the lack of curriculum focused on incorporating LGBTQ+ families into the learning structure. Examples were provided such as in health courses that include same-gender attraction, LGBTQ+ families and relationships.

The further divide was expressed around days such as Mother's Day or Father's Day which does not reflect the diversity of family compositions and can cause anxiety and stress for some children and families. Participants also expressed experiences of "tokenism" when being identified as the first LGBTQ+ parents in the classroom or daycare. Experiences of outing oneself in order to avoid awkward conversations at a later date were discussed and related to the experience of division within the school system.

Concern regarding how zero tolerance policies are enforced when homophobic and transphobic incidents occur and if teachers were educated to address these experiences. Parents felt they are the ones that have to speak up about these issues. Parents spoke of having their children attend Catholic secondary schools and the impact that this has on the children due to experiences of exclusion and isolation. Parents expressed their children "being forced to disconnect from their religion even if that's what they want because they can't reconcile the two parts of themselves". When considering Catholic schools and their curriculum parents relayed that their decision to send their children to religious schools has been negatively impacted. Administrative aspects within schools and resources were also identified as lacking inclusivity. There is a lack of gender-neutral washrooms in schools and administrative forms should be inclusive of all types of families and made more gender neutral. This impacts LGBTQ+ visibility within schools which also extends into what resources are made available. Experiences were shared by participants that include being told to take LGBTQ+ friendly books out of a Christian daycare and one mother was not allowed to include LGBTQ+ issues in an anti-bullying campaign as to "not rock the boat with other parents".

Participants suggested buying LGBTQ+ friendly books for teachers so there is more diversity in course content, having resources and events be inclusive, integrating positive space groups into elementary schools, and creating gender-neutral washroom in response to some of these barriers.

Support Services

Assets related to support services in Hamilton were identified as the helpfulness that support groups provide for transgender and non-conforming individuals, however, they need to run more than once a month.

Parents identified that there is a large gap in supportive services that are directed towards supporting LGBTQ+ individuals, youths and families. Resources are often minimal, not well advertised, expensive or out of the area which leads to greater inaccessibility. When conducting self-guided research into resources participants stated that many web links and phone numbers are out of date, do not work or led participants in circles.

Accessing LGBTQ+ friendly counselling and mental health services for parents and children were experienced to be inaccessible in Hamilton. Parents of LGBTQ+ children experienced difficulty entering the supports in the health and mental health system as it

requires their child(ren) to meet very specific and strong criteria for receiving specific supports, which has created an additional barrier. Waitlists are also very long and can exceed six months, however paying for private counselling is often unaffordable.

Services for parents and trans youth were specifically identified as lacking, noting there are no services for children who want to transition. This is also compounded by barriers of high cost and the time it takes to travel out of the area to access supportive services. Supportive resources that can help children navigate the processes of changing their birth certificates are also needed.

Shelter services are also lacking in providing support to the LGBTQ+ population as there are no specific LGBTQ+ shelters. Current shelters need to reform their policies and responses to supporting queer and trans individuals, particularly when individuals are experiencing domestic violence.

Community Centre

A community centre was viewed as being an asset that could be provided to the LGBTQ+ population especially because there currently is not one. The community centre would help to increase the visibility of the LGBTQ+ population in relation to the general Hamilton population, increase inclusivity and reduce experiences of social isolation. It would act as a central hub for information and resources, supporting groups like PFLAG, provide counselling for all ages and have staff that can provide relevant information and host events.

“It would be a place for people to work together and coordinate queer family led field trips and other social events.” Participant, General session

The lack of an LGBTQ+ specific community space was identified as creating and maintaining many barriers for the LGBTQ+ populations. These barriers include social isolation, limited access to community events supporting LGBTQ+ populations and communication opportunities that supporting LGTBQ+ families to connect with each other. Facebook was identified as an avenue for connection, however, Facebook groups have closed membership which limits the opportunities for outreach.

Space is limited that is identified as being LGBTQ+ friendly which limits families opportunities to come together and this can make living in Hamilton a lonely experience. Some participants identified it as being “shocking and isolating” when moving from Toronto to Hamilton. Many public spaces are centred within heteronormativity, spaces such as restaurants can re-affirm heteronormativity mentality. Acts such as assuming bills will be separate because the patrons are viewed as presenting with the same gender. This acts as an added layer of social exclusion for individuals and families when interacting with their communities. A list of queer-friendly restaurants would be beneficial.

Housing

Some areas in Hamilton were identified as being LGBTQ+ friendly, as well as some specified housing providers. Good Shepherd's housing programming was highlighted as being a positive within the community. West Hamilton area was also identified as being an area within the city that is considered more inclusive. Access to housing that is safe, affordable and LGBTQ+ positive is difficult for LGBTQ+ individuals to navigate. The downtown of Hamilton is experienced as being a dangerous space, particularly for LGBTQ+ youth due to discrimination. Hamilton is identified as having neighbourhoods that are LGBTQ+ friendly but they are dispersed throughout the city and hard to find or identify.

Safety

Safety was expressed as a barrier with individuals and families expressing feelings of being unwanted. This was discussed as having impacts on their experiences of safety within their communities and in the broader Hamilton community. These feelings were connected to feeling invisible, and "becoming the voice of all queer people". One participant shared their feelings that Hamilton was a diverse place until they came out, then they started realizing what was missing in their community.

5.8 Key Findings

1. Parents referred to the heteronormativity of the health systems, including physical health care, sexual health, and family planning services, making the case that more training on LGBTQ+ topics is needed.
2. The educational system is in need of more visible inclusion of the LGBTQ+ children and families, with changes to standardized forms, commemoration of queer and trans events like Day of Pink, mandatory Positive Space groups in both Catholic and public high schools, and more training for all school employees.
3. LGBTQ+ parents and parents of LGBTQ+ children experience isolation and see and LGBTQ+ community centre as a solution to connecting with other parents as well as the community in general for support and family-friendly social events.

5.9 General LGBTQ+ Community Consultation

Introduction

The LGBTQ+ General Community consultation was held at Good Shepherd Square. 30 individuals signed registration upon arrival; however some participants wanted to remain anonymous and therefore did not sign in.

The first guest speaker was a woman who wished to remain anonymous. She spoke about her experience as a refugee who came to Canada fleeing violence and persecution because of being a lesbian. She bravely shared her story about overcoming horrific circumstance. She attributes that coming to Hamilton saved her life, not only

because she escaped physical violence but because she has found hope. She had begun to feel safe being out and finding her community here.

The second guest was Savoy “Kapow” Howe, the founder of the Toronto Newsgirls Boxing Club and an LGBTQ+ activist. She spoke about the lack of female and queer representation in boxing and how this motivated her to create an inclusive gym for woman and trans folks. Savoy encouraged Hamiltonians to approach queer and trans advocacy with big dreams, hard work and preservation.

Health

Participants of the group discussed the need for more inclusive LGBTQ+ health services and specific LGBTQ+ health supports. These were suggested as being able to be provided through the development of a LGBTQ+ focused health centre with trained nurses and doctors, with specific training to LGBTQ+ and trans needs. An alternate avenue of support proposed was providing hospitals with trained doctors and nursing staff that would specialize in LGBTQ+ and trans health needs, however the overlying approach would be to train all health service providers. It was identified that LGBTQ+ individuals should be the ones that train non-LGBTQ+. Having more LGBTQ+ identified workers in hospitals that can act as advocates for patients was identified as a resource that is needed, in order to offer support with existing health care centres.

“We could have a queer health worker that could connect with already existing services and assist with training/development of inclusive programs.”

Participant, General session

Continual training of staff was viewed as being an intervention that could seek to better support LGBTQ+ populations. Training about LGBTQ+ specific health needs is a step in the right direction but training needs to be re-occurring and evolving, in order to maintain education of the diversity of LGBTQ+ needs.

A need for more accessible and appropriate health information also arose. The use of language and imagery in available resources does not often capture the scale of experiences of LGBTQ+ populations. Developing websites and print materials that cater to queer and trans health issues, having them publicly available and visibly advertised, would better serve the LGBTQ+ community in making informed health care decisions. At the allies and service providers table, the overarching themes related to health were very similar. They identified that there is a need for both LGBTQ+ specific workers and services, as well as an increasing trend in training non-LGBTQ+ individuals that goes beyond Positive Space Training and use of signage.

Outreach (Support Services)

The Outreach component of the general LGBTQ+ community consultation was identified only within this specific consultation. However, it closely connects with the identified needs and gaps from other consultations identified as Support Services. The two have been combined in order to best reflect the overall message of the General

LGBTQ+ population consult and the other consultations in which Support Services were explicitly identified.

What was needed in relation to support services for LGBTQ+ individuals were identified as being varied but with some commonalities. Support services need to be based within the diverse needs of the LGBTQ+ population and should be staffed by as many LGBTQ+ individuals as possible in order to foster inclusion, offer knowledgeable and accessible resources and provide greater LGBTQ+ visibility within the larger community. Participants identified that connecting with the broader community is needed to foster increased education about LGBTQ+ populations and increase the inclusivity of LGBTQ+ needs and people. This works to strengthen community ties, reduce social isolation and barriers for LGBTQ+ individuals which was an experience that was identified in many of the consultation sessions.

Participants identified many groups of the LGBTQ+ population experience marginalization from society. An acknowledgment of the various intersecting identities a person can have and that can overlap with each other, with such as sexual orientation and gender identity and how these can contribute to marginalization. It was specifically highlighted that there is currently a lack of trans-specific services in Hamilton. Discussions at the table acknowledged the need for formal supports for trans people, as well as mentorships for families raising trans children. No matter how someone identifies, they should be able to receive support services that meet their needs was echoed by the consultation participants.

In general, LGBTQ+ participants reported that outreach and supports should include the characteristics of sex positivity, peer support, accessibility, strengths-focused and be collaborative in nature.

Community Centre

A community centre was agreed as a needed resource for the LGBTQ+ population in Hamilton and would provide many great benefits. It was identified that a “one-stop-shop” for resource availability would be ideal and the community centre could support this need. The community centre was discussed as being an opportunity and resource that would connect individuals from different generations and across all lifespans. Accessibility was stressed as a key factor for the success of the program. Participants strongly identified that access to resources need to be varied. Resources need to be made accessible by providing different ways to access them, online, in-person or through telephone support. The variation of support seeks to connect all age demographics of the LGBTQ+ population with resources in their communities. Each generation has different levels of resource connections, some prefer utilizing an online or social media connection while others prefer through telephone or in-person support. As well it seeks to reduce the barrier that finances can have for some individuals in accessing services such as the cost of transportation, internet availability or comfortability with technology.

The physical location of the community centre would be accessible by bus services in order to reduce accessibility barriers, have multiple meeting rooms, designated youth

space, designated senior space, a discrete entrance and exit to maintain safety, free WIFI and the ability for space to be booked and utilized for a fee based on a sliding scale of affordability. Structure to the community centre would be helpful with the use of a diverse board of directors, clear policies, paid and unpaid positions and a main branch with satellite sites throughout Hamilton. Different sites would to specific community needs. Secure funding would help to make the centre more sustainable and provide employment opportunities for LGBTQ+ people in Hamilton.

Programs identified by the community as being the most in demand are: film nights, newcomer meetings, queer health conferences, safe gyms and sporting activities, art programs, family-oriented programs, support for substance use and alcohol-free events. Connections within the LGBTQ+ community were identified as being a fundamental focus, with the opportunity for individuals to connect with each other, hear stories, learn histories and reduce prejudices and bias that occurs within the LGBTQ+ community. Connecting with each other was viewed as being a paramount benefit to the community space and fostering a more positive LGBTQ+ based community.

At the allies and service providers table, discussion centered around providing a community centre that offered many different purposes and services in order to accommodate a variety of needs and provide options. Participants expressed that a community centre would offer social engagements such as movie night but also offer opportunities for conferences focused on queer and trans topics.

Extracurricular

The participants at the General LGBTQ+ consultation identified extracurricular as a category of focus. This specific area is not represented within the other consult sessions but closely aligns with the “Social” category.

Extracurricular activities were identified as needing to be diverse across the different generations within the LGBTQ+ community but also activities that could support the mixing of different generations. Programs and services were aimed at developing opportunities in the areas of arts, drama, healing art, telling stories, theatre, anime and manga, and poetry. Sporting activities such as boxing, gyms and safe swims were identified as being opportunities for development and inclusion while participating in health and wellness activities. Activities that supported school aged children and youth were also identified such as after school programming.

Other avenues of social inclusion and development were discussed in relation to community spaces and activities such as social gatherings in places like coffee shops. This helped support the need for spaces that are outside of alcohol consumption and can be accessed by different ages groups. The need and focus of this age friendly space mirrored that of the community centre, hosting events, meetings and workshops as requested by the community.

Public Space

Public space was identified in relation to creating a space that went beyond a community centre, it would be a larger public space. The possibility of creating a space, such as a street or village that is known to be LGBTQ+ friendly and focused, similar to the Church Street in Toronto. This would look to increase and improve public safety and inclusivity in general for queer and trans people in Hamilton.

Public space safety was a consistent topic during the consultations and looked at how to make current spaces safer. A strategy proposed was to increase gender neutral washrooms in public space. Increasing gender neutral washrooms would work as a trickle effect by increasing experiences of safety that would expand to spaces or streets and in time influence change creating safer and accepting communities.

“Gender neutral bathrooms can open a lot of doors for making public space feel safe.” Participant, General session

Although the spreading of LGBTQ+ friendly spaces is welcomed and needed it does not provide the same level of support, identity and inclusionary space that a street or village would offer. It was recognized that in order to develop a ‘safe street’ there is a need to involve the City of Hamilton, LGBTQ+ business owners and LGBTQ+ artists in developing a safe street. Service providers and allies, identified the need for the street to be inclusive of all level of income variations in order to present the diversity within the LGBTQ+ population. Accessibility in relation to multiple transit options and the inclusion of green spaces was identified as needed components in the space. Ideas related to what could contribute to the Queen Street echoed, LGBTQ+ participants’ feedback about arts and culture (book stores, theatre, film festivals), recreation options (parks, playgrounds, sporting facilities), housing and accommodations (housing units, retirement living, hotels) and services (community centre health services, HIV testing) with an overall feeling of acceptance and inclusion.

Archives/Research

The need and hope for a space dedicated to the local LGBTQ+ history was discussed and identified by session participants. This included a space that would be dedicated to the physical memorabilia, such as newspaper articles and other tangible artifacts surrounding LGBTQ+ histories. The hope for the space is to bring together the different LGBTQ+ generations in order to foster and strengthen the opportunity to learn from each other and increase a sense of community. It was mentioned that it would be ideal for this to be housed at the community centre down the road, but in that in the meantime work would be done to preserve the local history.

The idea arose of an informal committee being shaped to begin this work, with the need of a paid position that coordinates archive efforts to be established in future.

Participants identified that this form of a project requires structure, access to resources and sustainability. Therefore, this requires the dedication of a staff person and larger existing network, such as the Hamilton Public Library, McMaster University or Public Health.

An archival project was viewed as doorway to more social activities such as reading groups, arts projects, and advocacy about social issues. This space could contribute to increasing partnerships with LGBTQ+ community, mobilizing marginalized voices and making information more accessible and readily available.

Service providers and allies focused on the research portion of this category, discussing that more funding is needed to publish reports and assessments of the LGBTQ+ Hamilton community. They identified the need to reach out to marginalized voices and ensure that research methods are both inclusive and representative.

5.10 Key Findings

1. Overwhelmingly, an LGBTQ+ community centre was agreed upon as a way to meet the needs of queer and trans people in Hamilton by providing a central location that would house information, resources, referrals, services, events and foster a sense of community.
2. LGBTQ+ Positive Space training needs to be longer, more intersectional, and mandatory for public serving professionals, such as health care providers, educators, police officers and social services.
3. On-going research with more diverse voices from the LGBTQ+ community as well as collaborating to create an archive of local LGBTQ+ history are necessary pieces to understanding queer and trans Hamiltonians and evolving into a city that is safer for LGBTQ+ people to live work, learn and play.
4. Larger level responses to inclusion and safety, offer greater benefits to the LGBTQ+ community such as a designate geographic area like a street or village.

6.0 Recommendations

Community Planning and Programming

The existing landscape of LGBTQ+ resources in Hamilton is scarce and scattered. A significant gap in services and recreational opportunities is felt by the community, resulting in a consistently strong demand for an LGBTQ+ community centre. It is essential that queer and trans people know that there is a designated place that is accommodating of their needs. At the same time, non-LGBTQ+ spaces should become more inclusive throughout the city, making the needs of LGBTQ+ people a clear priority when considering accessibility.

- a) It is recommended that the City of Hamilton take the leadership in creating an LGBTQ+ Community Centre offering support services and social opportunities in a safe, alcohol-free space.
- b) The centralization of LGBTQ+ related information should occur through a website, phone line, and physical resources that provide consistent, up-to-date information about services, programming, and events for the LGBTQ+ community.
- c) A planning organization should take on the task of creating an asset map of resources and services for LGBTQ+ people in Hamilton.
- d) It is recommended that community-wide collaboration meetings occur 3-4 times per year with existing committees working on LGBTQ+ topics (e.g. Queer Youth Planning Collaborative, City of Hamilton LGBTQ Advisory Committee, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, Hamilton Police Services, Hamilton Health Sciences, etc.) for the purpose of sharing information and developing tasks towards making Hamilton more inclusive for LGBTQ+ people.

Services and Resources

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 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.

- a) Health care providers (Hamilton Health Sciences, St. Joseph's Health Care, community health centres, walk-in clinics, etc.) must undertake the LGBTQ+ Positive Space organizational checklist and make appropriate changes to be more inclusive.
- b) Sexual health care and family planning services (Public Health, community health centres, fertility clinics, etc.) must undertake the LGBTQ+ Positive Space organizational checklist and make appropriate changes to be more inclusive.

c) Services for the aging (long-term care facilities, nurses, personal support workers, physiotherapists, Community Care Access Centre, etc) must undertake the LGBTQ+ Positive Space organizational checklist and make appropriate changes to be more inclusive.

d) LGBTQ+ specific counselling for all ages and intersections with the community should be offered at no cost, available with short waitlists, and be provided in multiple languages.

Training and Education

Currently, service providers and professionals in Hamilton lack consistent knowledge about LGBTQ+ topics. Efforts are required to train existing workers at the same time as changes are being made to post-secondary curriculums so that LGBTQ+ issues are given more time and depth during educational requirements for professionals. The capacity of everyone working with queer and trans people must be raised in order to ensure staff are more knowledgeable and capable when working with the community.

a) It is recommended that consistent and continuous LGBTQ+ Positive Space Training be mandatory for professionals and service agencies (e.g. health care providers, teachers, social workers, lawyers, police officers, child welfare workers, housing providers).

b) A standard of practice for LGBTQ+ Positive Space Training should include an increased focus on trans topics and address the ways in which other identities can intersect with a queer or trans identity (e.g. ability, race, income, age, etc.). A follow-up should be required in order to ensure that spaces displaying the Positive Space sign are putting their training into practice.

c) Post-secondary institutions (such as McMaster University and Mohawk College) should update curriculums to include more LGBTQ+ topics with increased depth during the education of health care professionals, police officers, teachers, and social workers.

Safety and Visibility

a) Persistent societal homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism, and cissexism threaten the physical, psychological, and social safety of LGBTQ+ people. Schools are a space in which an unacceptable amount of discrimination continues to be experienced by LGBTQ+ children and children who have LGBTQ+ parents. Moving through the city as an LGBTQ+ individual comes with fears about being openly out or perceived as queer, making everyday tasks such as entering a store or riding the bus potential venues for harassment. Since safety can be a concern for community members who are not openly “out” in any or all areas of their lives, but still wish to access LGBTQ+ specific supports, the need for confidentiality is even more important.

b) It is recommended that the HWDSB and HWCDSB make LGBTQ+ Positive Space groups in secondary schools mandatory while providing related training and resources to staff who administer these groups. The enforcement of anti-bullying policies must be

consistently adopted city-wide in all schools to counter discriminatory speech and behaviours experienced by LGBTQ+ children or children with LGBTQ+ parents.

c) The City of Hamilton and the Chamber of Commerce must make a greater effort to support LGBTQ+ and allied businesses to open in Hamilton.

d) LGBTQ+ Positive Space Training should be required for all public service staff members, including the Hamilton Street Railway.

e) Service providers must ensure that service users are aware of confidentiality policies and that they are upheld through the agency. Accommodations to protect the privacy of queer and trans individuals should be offered and made as needed.

f) More LGBTQ+ community leaders are needed to diversify the public voices that speak to queer and trans issues and advocate for change in Hamilton.

Research and Archives

Special consideration should be applied that there are individuals that were unable to attend the “General LGBTQ+ population” community consultation due to different barriers, such as feeling unsafe to attend, financial barriers, language barriers etc., which can affect the overall representation of the “general” LGBTQ+ population. With further research, a more representative picture of the whole LGBTQ+ community in Hamilton could be attained. There was an obvious desire from the community to have a space in which people could access information and paraphernalia related to the local history of LGBTQ+ people. They would also like the acknowledgment of this history to lead to more opportunities in Hamilton to organize and work together to create a better city for the community.

a) It is recommended that there be ongoing and broader-reaching research with the LGBTQ+ community to better understand the needs of the diverse community and all of its intersections, with specific outreach to populations who experience additional barriers to participation.

b) An archive about the history of LGBTQ+ people in Hamilton should be created and housed in a designated space, which provides opportunities for the public to access it for free, share stories, and develop intergenerational connections.

Organizational Changes

Any organization can begin to practice more LGBTQ+ inclusiveness starting now. Increasing the number of policies and practices that work towards inclusion and equity for the community can be undertaken throughout the city. Changes to organizational tools and physical spaces are possible so that the queer and trans communities feel safe and welcomed. Agencies must create accountability measures to become more accessible for LGBTQ+ folks and commit to a trajectory of improvement over the short- and long-term.

- a) Every organization and business should commit to an assessment of their workplace with regards to LGBTQ+ inclusiveness and make appropriate changes on an ongoing basis. This accountability could be achieved by hiring a worker whose function is to accomplish these tasks and monitor them moving forward.
- b) It is recommended that gender neutral washrooms and change rooms be adopted as the standard.
- c) Standardized forms and intake procedures should be updated to be more inclusive, such as the removal of asking someone's gender or, alternatively, providing more options or a blank space in response to the question.
- d) Workplaces should be more visibly LGBTQ+ inclusive in their policies, practices, and hiring to create employment opportunities for community members and increasing the number of safe spaces in Hamilton.
- e) Organizations must diversify their teams to become more reflective of the community, which includes ensuring that 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, etc).

7.0 Conclusion

Flags Are Not Enough

Many flagship institutions in Hamilton have worked hard to increase the visibility of their organizations as LGBTQ+ positive spaces since the last community needs assessment was completed in 2007 by the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. While this has often been done through Pride flag raising ceremonies, posting positive space symbols and marking significant community days with press conferences or t-shirt wearing, it is time to deepen that pursuit with solid changes in policies and practices that impact the needs of queer and trans people more tangibly in their day to day lives.

Some outcome-oriented change has taken place since the Speak Out! community conversations took place in 2016. For example, the City of Hamilton had to respond to a complaint to the Ontario Human Rights Commission by a trans woman denied access to a public washroom by a City employee. The result has been a Protocol for Gender Identity and Gender Expression; Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Persons in which The City commits to “providing a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for community members who use our services and for all employees,” and recognizes, “transgender and gender non-conforming persons constitute one of the most disadvantaged groups in our society.” Mandatory training about trans inclusion is now required for city staff doing front line work.

As well, an online survey from McMaster University sought input to form a third community needs assessment with results of over 1,000 surveys completed, included over 400 at Hamilton Pride in June 2018. That data is currently being collated and a community meeting to release initial findings is anticipated early in 2019.

Building on the 2007 recommendations, the five #HamOnt LGBTQ Speak Out! community consultations, resulted in almost 150 voices of lived experience in the LGBTQ+ community of communities and ally service providers identifying six recommendation areas: LGBTQ+ Positive Community Space; Physical, Sexual and Mental Health Services; Training and Education; Safety & Visibility; Organizational Changes; and Research and Community Planning.

It is hoped these recommendations will form a guide for the next steps the City of Hamilton, other public institutions and flagship employers need to take in order to make this city an inclusive and positive space for LGBTQ+ people to live, work learn and play.

APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY of TERMS

In order to do the work of creating positive spaces for the LGBTQ+ community, it is important to understand the terms and language use related to the many identities and issues in the community. The following is a list of important terms and their meanings as applicable to the LGBTQ+ community.

Ally: An ally is an individual who is not a member of a specific group, but who works to end discrimination and oppression of that group. An example would be a lesbian woman who actively works to end discrimination against transgender individuals or a straight man who combats homophobia.

Asexual: An umbrella term for individuals who do not experience sexual attraction; it is a very broad and diverse community with a range of interest in relationships and sexual activity. Asexuality is not to be confused with celibacy or abstinence, which are behaviours, not attraction.

Biphobia: Fear or hatred of those assumed to be bisexual.

Bisexual/bi: An individual who is emotionally, romantically and sexually attracted to people of various genders. A bisexual person may be attracted to men, women, or trans and non-binary folks in ways that are different for each and every person.

Boi: For lesbians, a boi is a woman who is biologically female, but has a boyish appearance or presentation. A boi may be lesbian identified or s/he may be trans identified. For gay men a boi is a gay man who is boyish or young in appearance or identity.

Butch: A woman who prefers traditionally masculine dress, style and expression, or identity.

Cisgender: A person whose gender identity and expression matches the gender typically associated with their biological sex.

Cissexism: The pervasive and underlying assumption that being cisgender is the normal and natural state of being which leads to an often unconscious bias and discrimination against transgender people.

Closeted/in the closet: The state of being secretive about one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Come out of the closet/Coming Out: The process of acknowledging one's true gender or sexual identity either to oneself or to others. This is most often used by an individual in terms of publicly announcing this part of one's identity. Coming out of the closet is an ongoing process for LGBTQ+ individuals who must repeat this process within all new situations throughout their lives.

Cross-dressing: The practice of dressing in clothes that are traditionally assigned to the gender which is not considered to be paired with your biological sex. For example, a biological male who wears women's clothes. Other terms include transvestite*** and drag.

Discrimination: Discrimination is a negative behaviour which serves to deny another individual their rights and security based on one element of who they are. Acts of discrimination build up over time and can be seen in actions by a more powerful social group against a less powerful social group. These actions lead to the less powerful group being in a state of oppression.

Drag/Drag King/Drag Queen: Assuming both the dress and mannerisms that are most often associated with one sex or the other in order to perform. This may be for purposes of emotional or sexual pleasure, or simply for fun. Dressing in drag is not an indication of sexual orientation.

Dyke: Once a derogatory term for lesbian, the word dyke was reclaimed by lesbians in the 1970's as slang and many lesbians now refer to themselves as dykes.

Gay: A man who is romantically, emotionally, and sexually attracted to other men. The term is often used to refer to both men and women, but it is most commonly used to refer to men. Many women also prefer terms like lesbian or dyke.

Gender: Used to describe those characteristics of women and men that are socially constructed, in contrast to those that are biologically determined. People are born female, male or intersex, but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. These learned attributes are what make up gender identity and determine gender roles.

Gender binary: The idea that there are only two genders (girls/women and boys/men) that are separate and unchanging. People who identify outside of the gender binary (such as people who are genderqueer) are said to have a non-binary gender identity.

Gender Identity: How you see yourself socially: woman, man, neither, or combination of both.

Harassment: To harass someone is to submit them to ongoing mistreatment, disrespect, bullying, or torment. Harassment is the ongoing experience of oppression directed towards members of marginalized groups.

Heteronormativity: The assumption that biological sex determines a person's gender identity and their sexual attraction.

eg. Female Biological Sex = Stereotypical female gender expression = Attraction to males

Heterosexism: The system by which heterosexuality is the assumed norm. This is the institutionalized assumption that everyone is, or should be heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior and preferable to homosexuality or bisexuality. Heterosexism forces LGBTQ+ individuals to struggle constantly against their own invisibility and creates challenges for them in creating a positive identity.

Heterosexual: An individual who is emotionally, romantically and sexually attracted to people of the “opposite” sex.

Heterosexual Privilege: Members of an oppressed group are denied privileges that members of the non-oppressed group often take for granted. These privileges are often so discrete that they can be difficult to identify. An example of heterosexual privilege is openly kissing in public without fear of threat or punishment.

Homophobia: The irrational fear or hatred of, aversion to, and discrimination against homosexuals, homosexuality, or behaviours or beliefs that do not conform to rigid sex role stereotypes. Fear enforces sexism as well as homophobia. This word describes anti-lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) attitudes and behaviours.

Homosexual: An individual who is emotionally, romantically and sexually attracted to people of the same sex. A medicalized term that most LGBTQ+ members would not relate to as an identity.

Inclusive/Inclusivity: Inclusivity is the act of taking account of and challenging the many systems of power and oppression throughout our society which serve to exclude. An inclusive space strives to represent a diversity of individuals and lifestyles through images, staffing, programming, policy and accessibility.

Intersex: One who is born biologically with both female and male or ambiguous genitalia.

LGBTQ: The commonly used initialism for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two spirit, intersex, queer and questioning individuals/communities in Canada. This initialism 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, LGBTTTTIQQ, QT) The plus sign (+) is now often added to indicate the inclusion of all sexual and gender identities within the queer community which can be up to 47 according to some references.

Lipstick lesbian: A lesbian who prefers traditionally feminine dress, style, expression, or identity.

Lesbian: A woman who is exclusively emotionally, romantically and sexually attracted to other women.

Oppression: Oppression is the systematic mistreatment of a group of people. This can include pervasive invalidation of a group based on race, religion, ethnicity, ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, sex, or age. In the case of the LGBTQ+ community, oppression is seen in the attitudes of transphobia, homophobia and heterosexism.

Outing: Publicly revealing the LGBTQ+ identity of an individual without their consent.

Positive Space: An LGBTQ+ Positive Space is an office, home, business or classroom that is designated as being accepting, welcoming, and safe for LGBTQ+ individuals. Individuals who are allies can also create positive space around them so that LGBTQ+ individuals find someone with whom they feel safe to share experiences.

Prejudice: Prejudice is a negative or hostile attitude towards a person or group that is formed without just or sufficient knowledge and which is based on negative stereotypes. The negative beliefs, attitudes or feelings about a person or a group based on only one characteristic leads to discrimination.

Queen: A man who prefers traditionally feminine dress, style, expression or identity.

Queer: Once known as a derogatory term for homosexual, 'queer' was reclaimed by LGBTQ+ activists as a proud name for themselves. Queer blurs both gender identity and sexual orientation and can be regarded as a more inclusive indication of variance than lesbian or gay. Use this term with caution as it is still commonly used as a derogatory term and not all LGBTQ+ individuals identify with this word.

Sex: Characteristics of women and men which are biologically determined. ***

Sexual Orientation: An individual's sexual identification which depends on a person's sexual relationships or affinity.

Straight: Another word for Heterosexual. May be used as an "umbrella" term to describe non-LGBTQ+ individuals.

They/Them: These are examples of gender-neutral pronouns, which do not associate gender with the individual being discussed and may be preferred by people who identify as gender non-binary or gender fluid.

Trans: (also Trans*, Transgender, Transsexual) An umbrella term that can be used to describe people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what they were assigned at birth. Some trans people may choose to medically transition by taking hormones or having surgery. Some trans people may choose to socially transition by changing their name, clothing, hair, etc.

Transphobia: Fear or hatred of those assumed to be transgender and anything connected to transgender culture and identity. Transphobia can include a range of behaviours from mild discomfort to hate speech and violence.

Two Spirit: A person possessing qualities of masculinity and femininity, with honoured roles in some Indigenous cultures. An identity used by some LGBTQ+ First Nations individuals.

Additional terms related to LGBTQ+ identities.