



calgary outlink

Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity

FINAL REPORT
PROGRAMMING FOR DIVERSE COMMUNITIES
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Purpose:

To evaluate potential needs of minority communities within the LGBT community population. To assess what kinds of services Calgary Outlink could provide for particular LGBT communities such as seniors, youth, people with disabilities, transsexual and transgendered people and their families, and faith communities.

About Us:

Calgary Outlink: Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity provides a safe community space equipped with support services, education opportunities, a crisis line, and access to resources. Outlink has been serving the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) communities of Calgary for over 25 years.

It is our mission to foster community and create networking opportunities for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, queer and questioning individuals (LGBTQ), and their families, friends, and allies.

Calgary Outlink is managed by a volunteer Board of Directors consisting of both LGBTQ community members and allies. The Board is committed to ensuring that the organization continues to meet the needs of its core support groups while providing strategic direction and oversight as Calgary Outlink continues to build its profile, relationships, and funding networks.

Background:

Outlink began as a phone line service, called Gay Lines, for LGBT people who needed support. Many times LGBT individuals or groups would approach Outlink in a desperate call for a particular program or service that community members needed. Outlink spent many years reacting to these needs from LGBT communities and it is only now as LGBT individuals have gained more equality rights, legal rights and social acceptance that we have been able to look at the community we serve and find out where there are gaps in the service we provide.

Two years ago Outlink conducted a community consultation of the overall needs of the LGBT communities and the general needs of LGBT individuals. We discovered in a community survey that 74.3% of participants are interested in attending a service, program, group, activity or event for LGBT communities. When asked what prevented participants from attending these groups, 49.5% of survey respondents said that there was a lack of services, programs, groups, activities or events that they identified with. For LGBT individuals in the Calgary area 77.8% of respondents said that peer support groups are *much needed* (22.2% said they were *somewhat needed*). Respondents also ranked the types of services and groups that are needed in Calgary to serve LGBT communities. Some of the needs that survey respondents ranked as necessary included:

- counseling support (35.3% of respondents);
- support for culturally diverse communities (21.3% of respondents);
- support for LGBT people with disabilities (8.7% of respondents);
- parenting groups (15% of respondents); and
- online peer support programs (34.8% of respondents).

These results indicated that further investigation needed to take place to understand what the specific needs were of populations that were LGBT but were also part of other communities such as cultural communities, people with disabilities, parents, youth and seniors.

Overall Evaluation Goals

What are the key supports that people need who are members of specific diverse LGBT groups?

Methodology

We contacted twelve diverse communities to request contacts who work with LGBT populations or are LGBT representatives of that community. The communities we contacted were: trans people, parents of trans people, trans youth, the Muslim community, LGBT youth, people with learning disabilities, people with mental/physical disabilities, seniors, lesbian parents, gay male parents, the Korean community, and other faith groups. We then asked those contacts for further contacts who might be interested in joining a focus group. Some communities did not have enough people within the Calgary area that were a member or ally of the LGBT population. From these initial contacts we chose five groups that had enough interest and where we could find enough LGBT or allies to participate within a focus group.

Learning Component

Outlink Staff took the lead in this project and learned the methodology and process of conducting an assessment as they went along. A discussion guide was developed for staff who facilitated the focus groups. Staff were given time to meet with consultants who were experienced in conducting focus groups and needs assessments. This resulted in learning by Staff and Board members.

Data Collection

Five Communities Participated in Focus Groups:

1. Trans identified families and youth
2. People with Disabilities
3. Faith based communities
4. Seniors
5. LGBT Youth Under 14

Focus Group Structure:

Focus groups were asked to meet with two facilitators for 90 minutes. Each participant was given a gift card after the session, for their participation. Participants were comprised of LGBT members as well as those who worked in non-profit organizations with the LGBT communities. Groups met in a casual office setting around a boardroom table.

Process and Activities:

The process was created to ensure first that participants knew this was a welcoming, open environment to share their triumphs and concerns regarding LGBT services to their specific groups. As it unfolded participants were brought deeper into their needs for particular services within Calgary. The final activity was brainstorming what the needs were on necessary services within Calgary, related to the participant's specific community.

The agenda for the meetings was as follows:

1. Welcome
2. Introductions
3. LGBT Life in Calgary

Objective: To provide insight into views about life in Calgary + life as an LGBT Community Member.

Process:

- a. Pick images from 400 pictures provided that describe life in Calgary today as an LGBT member or ally.
- b. Discuss images as a group and how they depict positive and negative ideas about Calgary.
- c. What are your impressions of the LGBT community in Calgary overall?
- d. What are the important challenges facing the LGBT Community at this time?

4. Views on LGBT Support Organizations in Calgary and Community Needs.

Objective: To better understand key organizations available to LGBT communities in Calgary and needs of community members.

Process:

- a. Brainstorm what organizations exist in LGBT communities and what they do.
 - b. Discuss how satisfied specific groups are with these organizations.
 - c. Discuss expectations of LGBT organizations.
 - d. Brainstorm what the needs are of LGBT communities, including individual, peers, and client.
5. Concluding remarks by participants and facilitators.

Interpretation

Surprisingly the five focus groups came up with similar results despite their membership in different groups. At the outset Outlink had expected that specific groups would have particular requests to meet the needs of that group. While this may be true when looking at the physical aspects of providing services, such as being on a C-train line for youth, providing large print resources for visibly impaired, it did not play out in the general needs of the specific communities. There were however differences in the barriers that each community faced. As such we were able to examine the needs of these communities and glean from this research four key focus areas for future work.

1. ***Creating safe zones: Events that are integrated, friendly, fun and social***

Participants in every group talked about how difficult it was to meet LGBT people in general. For instance, participants in the disability focus group said that physical space that was affordable, disability friendly, private and integrated was a key aspect of normalizing their experience. Providing a space that is friendly to people with disabilities means not only having it accessible but also having an educated space where other participants are open and accepting to diversity. Participants in the faith group spoke of a multi-spiritual event where people could connect on their spirituality and LGBT status.

Participants talked about integrating spaces so that there was less focus on difference and more focus on the ways in which different communities interact in a positive way. For instance, seniors said that there is an opportunity to provide a supportive relationship between youth and seniors where they can exchange information and support one another.

Most groups did want a private space and time to discuss the barriers and successes of belonging to a specific group within the LGBT community. For instance, seniors also wanted a safe zone just for seniors so that they would have a special place for them that would not get sidetracked into other communities. Trans parents needed time to process the challenges their children were facing. Faith communities wanted a “sense of community, irrespective of faith”.

Each community mentioned the isolation they felt when they did not have other LGBT members who identified with their experiences. Safe events that are friendly, fun and social would greatly decrease this isolation but only if they occur at regular intervals.

Participants acknowledged that developing spaces that were safe zones might be a problem because of the lack of resources. However they suggested partnering with other organizations and initially starting pilot programs in spaces that are already funded.

2. *Training service providers on LGBT friendly practices.*

Participants felt that a key aspect of feeling supported and safe was to use resources that already existed. Some of these resources can be found in organizations that need more training on LGBT experiences, while other organizations are already LGBT friendly but have not advertised as such.

Education is integral in partnerships with other service providers. Also educators themselves, such as teachers, need to be educated further on LGBT issues. Participants wanted to have opportunities for LGBT friendly counseling, advocacy, and mentorship. They suggested that service providers that were trained properly could provide support in these areas.

It was noted that some agencies, such as the Homecare for seniors program, are already LGBT friendly but people still hide their sexual orientation and gender identity because of the belief that some agencies are not accepting. In addition, the assumption that many agencies were homophobic brought about the issue of making it difficult to find people and agencies that are LGBT or allies.

3. *Making specific groups visible within the LGBT community and decreasing the feeling of isolation in the broader community.*

Participants talked about feeling invisible. Specific communities, such as seniors felt invisible as part of the LGBT community, or unable to find each other. People with disabilities were invisible to the LGBT community and physically unable to attend non-accessible events, which exacerbated this invisibility. Trans youth under 14 felt that there was not as much support for them. Individuals in the faith group were excluded from their faith because of their LGBT status.

Invisibility caused communities to feel isolated regarding their status as LGBT. Ensuring that advertisements are aimed at specific groups within the LGBT communities would help with this invisibility. Also having events that integrated various communities so that there was a broader sense of diversity at LGBT events would help to normalize difference.

4. *Chasing the vision of an LGBT Community Center*

There was almost unanimous support for an LGBT Community Center in Calgary. Participants felt that a Center would give credibility to the community, provide regular staff and normalize LGBT

experience. They suggested that partnering with other organizations would be a key aspect of developing the funding, community support and feel for an LGBT Community Center.

There were varying ideas of what would be in a community center. All groups mentioned that it would provide a safe zone for meeting and socializing. Youth under 14 felt that they wanted an unstructured space and not just a space for structured support groups. People with disabilities felt that it should be a non-exclusive model like the Women's Centre that provided a social space with special event nights. Seniors wanted to create some particular programs focused on seniors. Trans people and families wanted a space for events like the Trans Day of Remembrance. Faith groups wanted something that would be appealing and lend credibility to the community. All groups wanted to feel part of the planning for the space and the development or volunteering for programs.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are some suggested avenues that could be pursued by Outlink or other organizations in the future. They address the feedback in the key areas offered by focus group participants.

1. Offer more social events that encourage a diverse, integrated, safe space for all LGBT communities.
2. Offer social spaces for specific groups within the LGBT communities.
3. Partner with other diversity-serving organizations to: help educate them on LGBT issues, offer assistance in developing supportive groups that meet the needs of their LGBT clients, and create further awareness of LGBT populations and the diversity within this community.
4. Find ways to connect specific groups that may develop mentorship relationships within the LGBT communities. For instance, creating events or venues where seniors can mentor youth, parents of trans youth can connect with other trans people, and people from different faith communities can connect with each other to find support.
5. Work with Youthsafe and the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre in their training program for service providers to enhance awareness about diverse LGBT populations.
6. Work with agencies that have been trained on LGBT awareness to get the word out that they are an LGBT friendly organization.
7. Create methods of connecting the LGBT community to the resources that are already available, such as creating an online Unity Pages that would advertise organizations that are LGBT friendly.

8. Educate LGBT and allied organizations on the importance of developing programs that are not only LGBT friendly but also welcoming to diverse communities such as seniors, people with disabilities and trans communities.
9. Partner with LGBT and allied organizations to work on the vision of an LGBT Community Center. Engage community in the process of developing a Center.