



Steps Towards Change: Supporting the Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning People with Intellectual Disabilities

Tess Vo, Supervisor, reachOUT Program
Rainbow Hunt, Peer Educator, Compass



Presentation Overview

- Program Overview
- Group Exercise – LGBTQ Terminology
- Voices of LGBT Youth – The Making of “Our Compass” Documentary (Presented by Rainbow Hunt)

Learning Overview

- Screening of “Our Compass” Documentary
- First Steps to Creating LGBTQ Positive Space
 - Need Assessment and Program Evaluation Results
- Question and Answer

The Context: Griffin Centre

- Griffin Centre is a non-profit charitable mental health agency providing flexible and accessible services to youth, adults and their families
- Our mission is to promote positive change for vulnerable youth and adults with mental health challenges and/or developmental disabilities and their families
- We are dedicated to delivering innovative services and developing creative partnerships that enhance lives and communities



Program Description

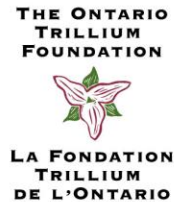
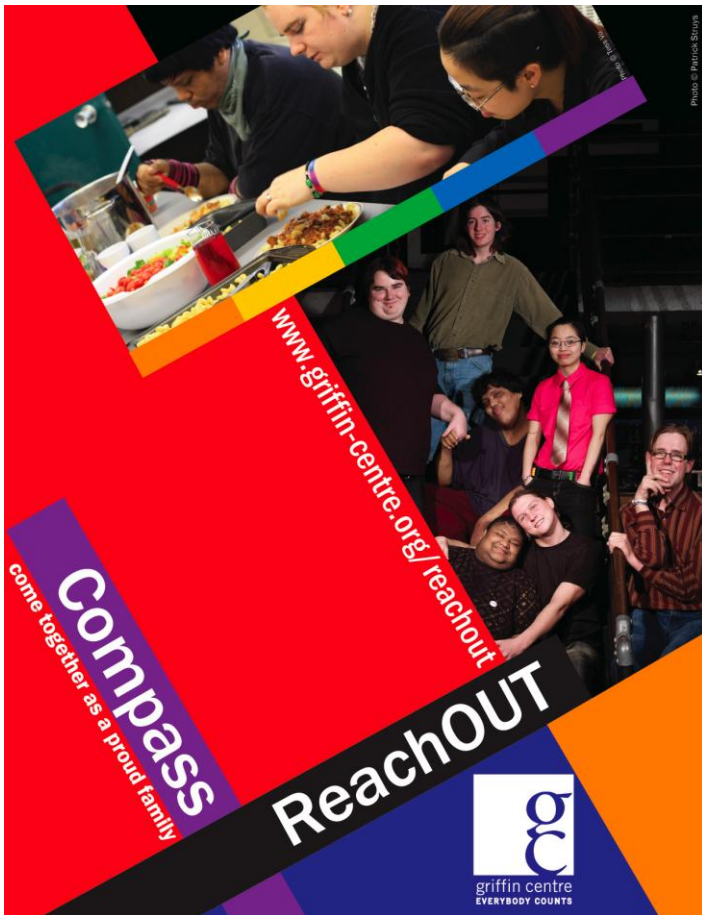
- reachOUT is a creative, inclusive & accessible program for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer youth and adults in the Greater Toronto Area. We offer safe spaces that reflect the diversity of our queer and trans communities

Services

- Drop-in Groups for LGBT Youth (13-24)
- Settlement Services for LGBT Newcomer Youth
- Counselling and Case Management
- Training
- Consultation
- Youth Engagement
- Arts Based Activities
- Research
- Program Evaluation

Compass

A weekly drop in group for LGBTQ youth who have been told they have intellectual disabilities



CONNECTING
LGBTQ PEOPLE
LABELLED
WITH
INTELLECTUAL
DISABILITIES
ACROSS
ONTARIO



www.griffin-centre.org



a griffin centre project

**For more information,
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sprOUT

- sprOUT is all about connecting LGBTQ people labeled with intellectual disabilities across Ontario
- We hold fun events such as dances, BBQs movie nights and parties
- Our workshops on sexual health, self advocacy and how to create LGBT positive spaces are co-facilitated by LGBTQ people labeled with intellectual disabilities
- We also offer consultation to individuals, their families and support workers

Definitions

Step 1: Please take a look at the words on the sheet and try to match your definition to the correct term.

Step 2: Once you have matched the words to the correct definition, place them under the appropriate column on the next sheet.

Gender and Sexual Identity

Gender Identity

- A person's self-identified sense of being male or female, transgendered or gender variant (anywhere on the continuum of male and female)

Sexual Identity

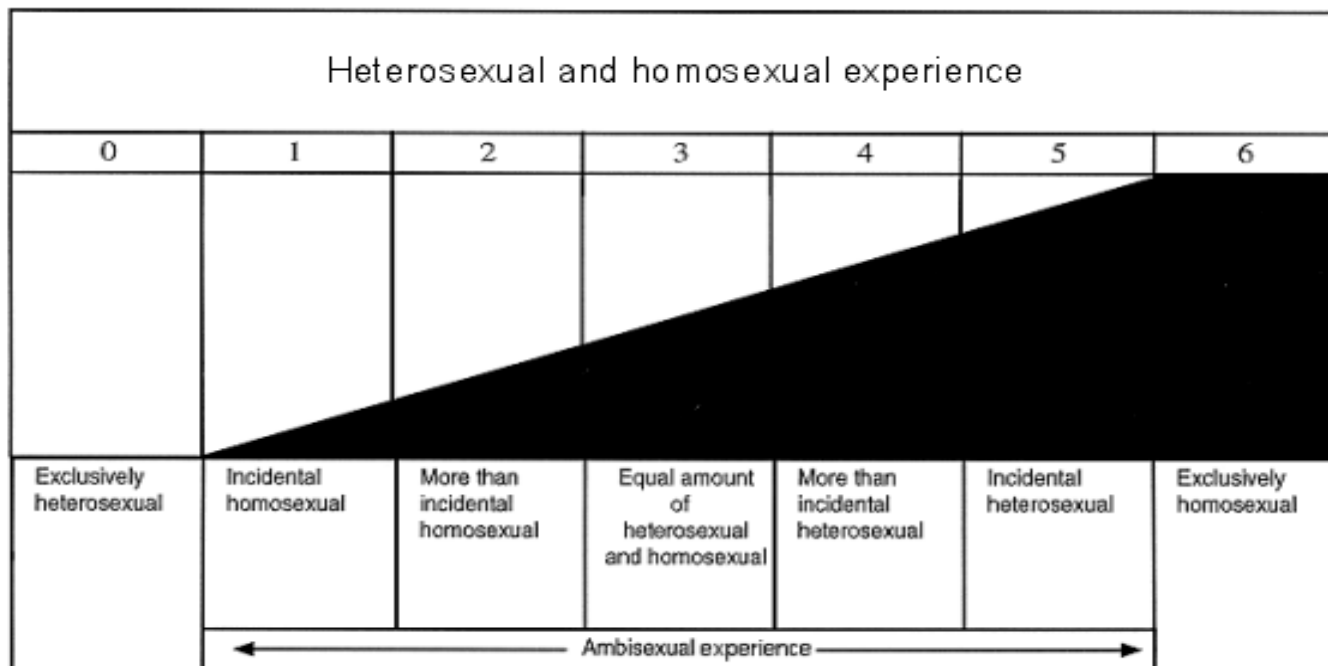
- The physical and emotional attraction of someone to persons of different, same or all genders. This can represent how an individual chooses to identify sexually

Definitions

Lesbian	Heterosexism	Gender Role	Gender Identity
Gay	Transgender	Homophobia	Cross - Dresser
Bisexual	Transsexual	Transphobia	Coming Out
Queer	Drag Queen/ Drag King	Sexual Orientation	LGBTQ

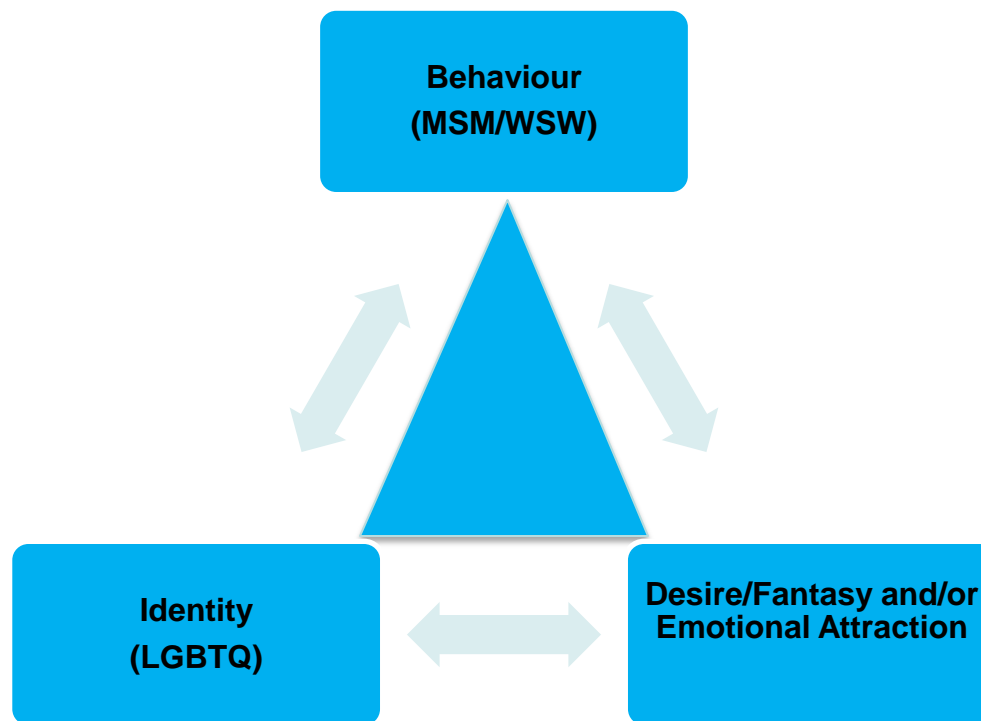
Continuum of Sexual Behavior

The Kinsey scale: a continuum of human sexual behavior



First published in 1948. University of Illinois at Springfield, Student Affairs Office. (2009). [A short non-technical discussion of sexual orientation and the Kinsey Scale.] Available at <http://www.uis.edu/studentaffairs/safezone/resources/documents/Sexuality%20Continuum.pdf>

Behaviour vs. Identity





The Making of Our Compass



OURCOMPASS

Received funding in 2008 from:

- ❑ Ministry of Child and Youth Services
Innovations Fund
- ❑ Ontario Trillium Foundation

Additional support from:

- ❑ City of Toronto, AIDS Prevention Community Investment Program

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Rainbow:

- **Theme:** Everyone picked a theme to express their gender identity and sexual orientation. Then we used these themes for our portraits. We took lots of pictures and we picked the ones we liked the best to represent us.

We decided on:

- **Content-**The questions that we were comfortable with. For example Tess asked, “Rainbow, how did your family feel about you coming out as a trans woman?”

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

- We also came up with the music, songs for the video
- We worked together for what we wanted to wear and what we wanted to look like for the video
- We created collages to help us
- Location: where we wanted to take pictures and the different locations – kitchen, queens park
- **Roles and Responsibilities:** We worked together to decide the editing: what goes in or out of the video.
- We decided things like who talks first
- We were given an honorarium for our involvement
- It was hard work, waking up early but we all worked together

Toronto Star Article

GROWING UP

Navigating the road to sexual awareness

When Rainbow Hunt was growing up, he was diagnosed with an intellectual disability. With that kind of label, it's easy for a child to feel isolated, even at schools that believe in truly inclusive education. But that's not what Hunt remembers most when he thinks of growing up and being left out.

Today, as a gay man in the process of becoming a transgender woman, it is his sexual journey that stands out in his memory.

"I was marginalized more because of my sexuality than my disability," he told a class at Ryerson University's school of disability studies this month.

Disabled people and sex. Why do we shrink from anything to do with the subject? And what does that tell us about ourselves?

A 21-year-old with Down Syndrome is causing a sensation in Britain these days after a documentary on his search for sex aired on the BBC. *Otto: Love Lust and Las Vegas* told the story of Otto Baxter, whose mother Lucy believes her son "has every right to have the same opportunities as everybody else." That would include visiting a sex worker if he wants.

But this is not just about sex, Lucy Baxter said. "He just wants a girlfriend."

Otto himself told the BBC (news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7948511.stm) that what he would like to do with a girlfriend is "have a shower together, wash her back and have a lazy day in bed. Also go to the cinema and things like that."

In the Ryerson classroom, Hunt talked about loneliness and the fact that life can be particularly difficult for people with intellectual disabilities when their sexuality



PATRICK STRUYS PHOTO

Romeo Pierre is a member of sprOUT and a participant in a documentary on young people labelled with intellectual disabilities who are exploring their sexuality. "I have friends now," says Pierre, who is focusing on hip hop and power. "We get to know people like us and come together as one."



HELEN HENDERSON
Direct Access

doesn't conform to what society has decreed to be the norm.

He was speaking as a member of sprOUT, a group aiming to connect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) people all over the province. Other members of the group, including Sam McKhail, Romeo Pierre, and C.J. Pung, who are also passionate about spreading the word.

"I have friends now," says Pierre, who has been exploring hip hop and power. "We get to know people like us and come together as one."

The sprOUT program is sponsored by Griffin Centre, which specializes in services for youth and adults who have developmental disabilities and mental health challenges (griffin-centre.org).



TESS VO PHOTO

Rainbow Hunt, centre, attends the Compass group at the Griffin Centre.

"We're happy to help others interested in forming similar groups," says coordinator Tess Vo. (416-222-1320, ext. 171, or email two@griffin-centre.org).

sprOUT is also part of a team producing a documentary on young people labelled with intellectual disabilities exploring their sexuality. Tentatively titled *Our Compass*, its backers include the provincial

Ministry of Children and Youth

Services, the Trillium Foundation and the City of Toronto.

And the name *Compass* is key to another Griffin Centre program, a weekly get-together for those under 25 who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, intersex, queer and/or still questioning their sexual identity.

If you think programs like this aren't important, Griffin Centre points out that lesbian, gay and bi-

sexual youth are 14 times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual youth. They're also three to five times more likely to experience substance abuse problems, the centre says.

Add intellectual disability into the mix and the road to self-discovery can become even more narrowing.

All people with disabilities face barriers when it comes to getting the information they need to make healthy and informed decisions about their sexual lives, says Lynda Roy of the Anne Johnson Health Station (ajhs.ca).

Roy, who is physically disabled and runs SexAbility, a peer-led workshop program, remembers friends and relatives treating her very differently from her able-bodied brother when the two were growing up.

"They would ask him about girlfriends but they never asked me anything like that," she recalls.

Helen Henderson is a freelance writer and disability studies student at Ryerson University. Her column appears Saturdays. helenhenderson@sympatico.ca

Launch at the AGO

Address
Art Gallery of Ontario
317 Dundas St. W., Toronto, Ontario
www.ago.net
416 979 6690 ext.503

OUR COMPASS

Wednesday,
October 21, 2009
6:00-8:00pm

LAL PERFORMANCE
SNACKS PROVIDED
FREE

a night exploring disability, sexuality and gender identity

Come check out a new art project featuring LGBTQ youth
labelled with intellectual disabilities

PHOTO EXHIBIT!
ARTIST TALK!
LIVE MUSIC!

Photographer: Tatiana Ariadne



THE ONTARIO
TRILLIUM
FOUNDATION



LA FONDATION
TRILLIUM
DE L'ONTARIO

designed by: JANEY OWEN@OWENSTUDIO.COM

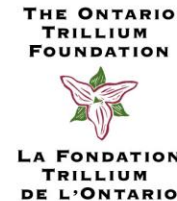
ARTIST
FOUNDATION



Recognition

- *Best Short Documentary, CINHOMO, Valladolid GLBT Film Festival, Spain, 2011*
- Audience Award for Best Short Narrative or Documentary at the ReelOUT Queer Film and Video Festival, Kingston, Ontario, 2011
- *Best Short Documentary, LesGaiCineMad, LGBT Film and Video Festival, Madrid, Spain, 2010*
- *Canadian Jury Recognition, Inside Out LGBT Film and Video Festival, Toronto, Ontario, 2010*

Documentary Screening



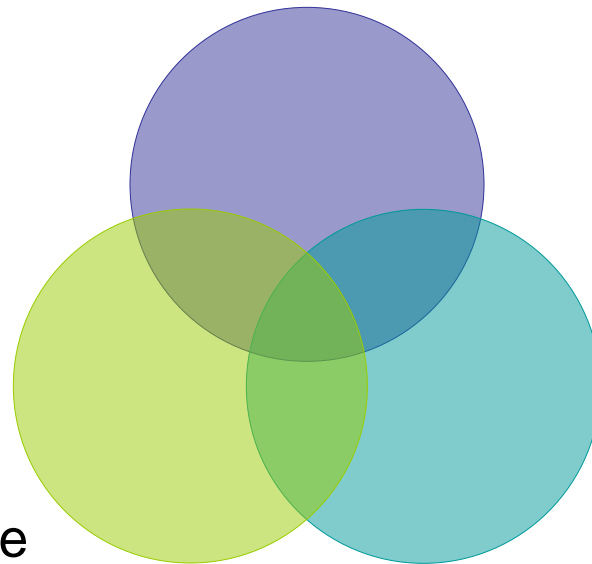


EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM



Educational Curriculum

Visual Aids



Workshop Guide

Educational
Documentary



I'm into video games
I'm into having a job
I'm into dating guys

I'm not into detention
I'm not into violence
I'm not into coffee

I'm Gay and
I have an intellectual
disability

A photograph of two young men. The man on the left is wearing a black fedora and a black shirt, looking towards the camera with a neutral expression. The man on the right is wearing glasses, a black polo shirt, and has his arm around the first man's shoulder, smiling. The background consists of vertical panels in green, blue, and purple.

A Gay guy is...

A guy who is attracted to another guy

A guy who wants to kiss another guy

A guy who has sex with another guy

A guy who wants to date another guy

A guy who gets crushes on another guy

A guy who falls in love with another guy

**I'm into coffee
I'm into wearing ties
I'm into school**

**I'm not into fighting
I'm not into barbie dolls
I'm not into stereotypes**

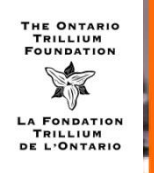
**I'm a Lesbian and
I have an intellectual
disability**





A lesbian is...

- A girl or woman who is attracted to other girls & women**
- A girl or woman who wants to kiss other girls & women**
- A girl or woman who has sex with other girls & women**
- A girl or woman who wants to date other girls & women**
- A girl or women who gets crushes on other girls & women**
- A girl or woman who falls in love with other girls & women**



A photograph of two young women laughing joyfully. The woman in the foreground is wearing glasses and a dark zip-up jacket. The woman behind her has spiky hair and is also laughing. They are positioned in front of a large rainbow flag that serves as a background. The entire image is framed by an orange border.

A Lesbian is...

A girl or woman who is attracted to other girls & women

A girl or woman who wants to kiss other girls & women

A girl or woman who has sex with other girls & women

A girl or woman who wants to date other girls & women

A girl or woman who gets crushes on other girls & women

A girl or woman who falls in love with other girls & women

Creating LGBTQ Positive Space



History

- Goes back 12 years when Griffin Centre began the multicultural anti-racist organizational change process
- In 1998-1999, we identified that we weren't seeing many youth who were identifying as lesbian or gay during our work with them
- Reviewing the “why” and what we need to change to be accessible to LGBTQ youth, became a goal of the Diversity Committee

The LGBT Committee

- Formed in 2001-2002
- Task group of the Diversity Committee
- Focus was on increasing accessibility to LGBTQ youth
 - Increasing number of out gay staff
 - Conducted Needs Assessment

The Needs Assessment

- Funded by City of Toronto Access & Equity Grant
- Purpose
 - To gain better understanding of needs of LGBT youth and training needs of staff in youth serving organizations
- Outreach and Interviews conducted with
 - LGBT Youth
 - Griffin staff
 - LGBT-serving and other agencies in the GTA
 - Guidance departments of several North York schools
 - Hospitals
 - Schools
 - Youth shelters

Values Based Programming

- Community Building
- Collaboration
- Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression
- Youth Engagement
- Social Determinants of Health
- Harm Reduction
- Strengths-Based

Program Evaluation: What Works for LGBT Youth?

Background and Motivation

- Questions focused on four themes
 - 1) creating a safe/supportive environment
 - 2) reducing social isolation
 - 3) fostering environments that affirm positive choices for coming out, and
 - 4) reduction in sexual risk taking behaviour

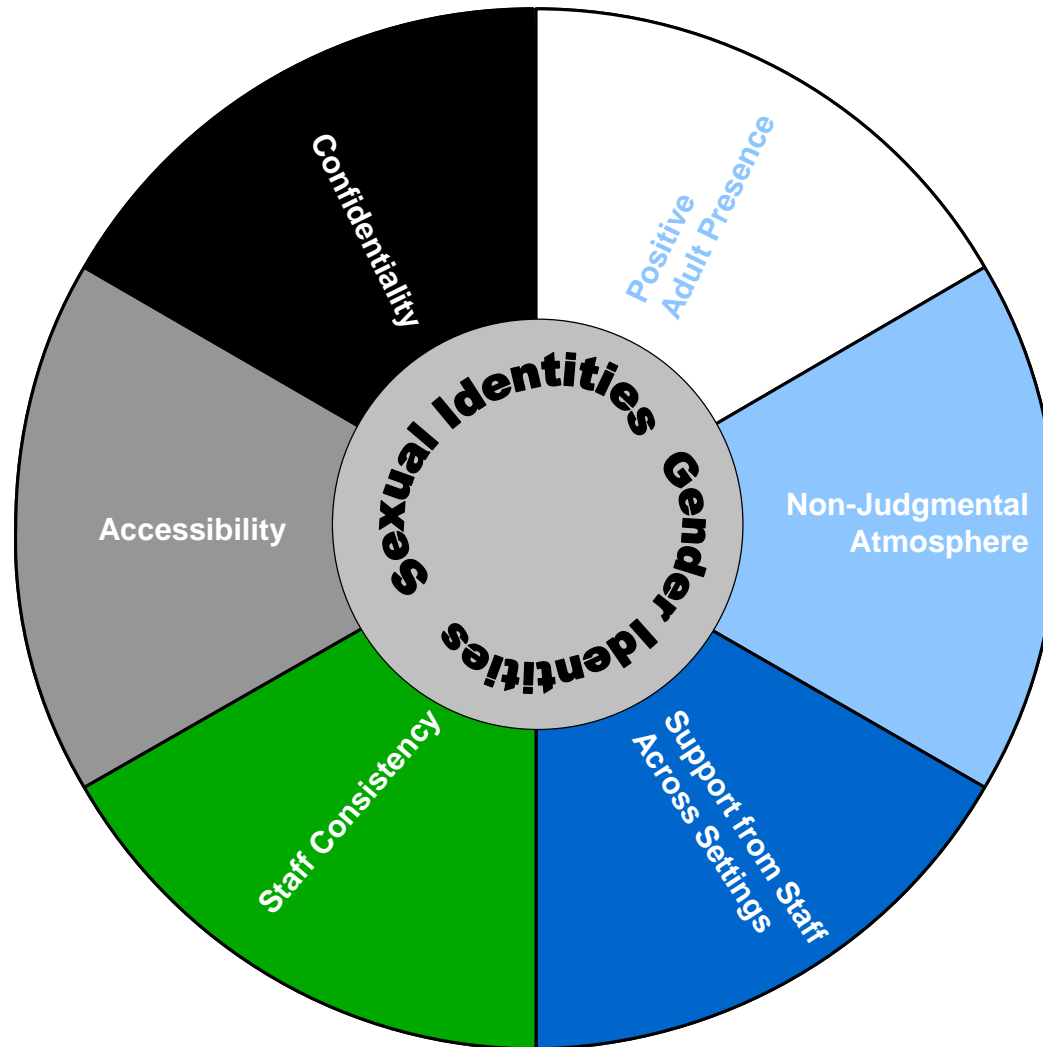
Materials and Methods

- Mixed Methods
 - Quantitative Data
 - Survey offered both online and on paper
 - Qualitative Data
 - In-depth audio taped one-on-one interviews
- Informed Consent
- Honoraria
- 35 youth participated
 - 21 completing interviews
 - 30 completed surveys

Results: Navigating Sexualities and Gender Identities

- Constructing identities which incorporate sexual identity, gender identity and expression can be a complex experience
- Our results strongly reflected the fluid, complex and diverse ways in which youth identify their sexualities and gender identities
- Youth did not simply identify as women, men, or trans men or women
- Sexualities and sexual attractions were similarly diverse, youth acknowledge that their ways of describing their identities change depending on who they are talking to

Keys to Creating Safe Spaces and Support for LGBTQ People



Keys to Creating Safe Spaces and Support for LGBTQ People

- **Non-Judgmental Atmosphere**

- Youth felt comfortable in their drop-in groups and said that staff did not judge them based on their gender identities, sexualities, substance use, mental health concerns, disabilities, or racial/ethnic/religious backgrounds.

- **Positive Adult Presence**

- Youth felt that the presence of staff was important to maintain the safe environment, set a standard of behaviour, create and maintain a culture of acceptance, and engage in group dynamics to address any issues that might make youth feel unsafe. (such as conflicts between group members). They also reported that the example set by the facilitators positively influenced the way group attendants acted toward each other.

- **Support from Staff Across Settings**

- Staff often supported were sensitive to youth's needs and problems, often identifying issues raised during groups and supporting youth outside of group time with information, resources, referrals, and counseling.



Keys to Creating Safe Spaces and Support for LGBTQ People

- **Staff Consistency**

- Participants emphasized the importance of staff consistency over time. Many youth in marginalized communities face a high level of insecurity in their lives. reachOUT drop-in groups and support workers often acted as youth's only consistent, reliable source of support.

- **Confidentiality**

- Participants reported that confidentiality was a key element supporting LGBTQ youth.

- **Accessibility**

- Youth felt that providing food and transit tickets were very important ways that individual counseling sessions and drop-in groups were kept open and accessible.

Resources



Canada's source for
HIV and hepatitis C
information

La source canadienne
de renseignements sur
le VIH et l'hépatite C



Stickin'out as Trans:
Homophobic and
Transphobic Hate,
Bullying and Harassment
are Not Tolerated

http://orders.catie.ca/product_info.php?products_id=25529

Closing

- Contact information
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