



# BUILDING QMUNITY

REPORT ON COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

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FOR DIALOGUE**

## Purpose of Document

This report is independently prepared by Simon Fraser University's Centre for Dialogue under the sponsorship of QMUNITY. The purpose is to present the full outcomes from the Building QMUNITY Consultation, held between May and August 2015. This publication is intended to convey the perspectives of participants at the one day *Building QMUNITY* dialogue, eight consultation sessions, and an online/paper survey. It does not necessarily reflect the opinions of Simon Fraser University's Centre for Dialogue or QMUNITY. This report is published in the Creative Commons (CC BY-ND) and may be reproduced without modification so long as credit is attributed to SFU's Centre for Dialogue. Any works referring to this material should cite: SFU's Centre for Dialogue. (2015). Building QMUNITY, Report on Community Consultation, retrieved from [sfu.ca/dialogue](http://sfu.ca/dialogue)

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## About Simon Fraser University's Centre for Dialogue

Simon Fraser University's Centre for Dialogue uses dialogue to generate non-partisan and constructive communication around difficult topics. We partner with government, business, and community groups to explore critical issues that impact the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of our communities. Find out more at [sfu.ca/dialogue](http://sfu.ca/dialogue)

# CONTENTS

Executive Summary .....	4
Building QMUNITY Consultation Dialogue .....	9
Small Group Consultation Dialogues .....	33
<i>Youth</i> .....	34
<i>QTIPOC</i> .....	36
<i>Seniors</i> .....	38
<i>Trans</i> .....	39
<i>Aboriginal/Two-Spirit</i> .....	41
<i>Newcomers and Immigrants</i> .....	42
Survey .....	45
Conclusions.....	50
Appendix.....	53
<i>Evaluations, Building QMUNITY Consultation Dialogue</i> .....	53
<i>Evaluations, Building QMUNITY Small Group Dialogues</i> .....	54

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SFU's Centre for Dialogue conducted a community-wide consultation to identify the perspectives of LGBTQ communities on QMUNITY's future roles and its programming priorities. The consultation comprised a multi-pronged engagement strategy including feedback from community partners, scoping interviews with stakeholders, a one day community dialogue, eight small dialogue sessions with focused LGBTQ communities, and a survey (online as well as paper-based). The consultation was initiated to provide feedback to QMUNITY useful for defining the organization's direction as well as for planning, developing and launching a new community centre in the West End of Vancouver (funded through a \$10 million grant from the city of Vancouver).

The conversations during the full day dialogue and small group sessions revealed significant excitement about QMUNITY's future as a central place for LGBTQ communities. Many participants expressed the hope that QMUNITY and its new facility will provide a positive space where all community members can feel welcome, comfortable and proud. A vision that resonated with many participants was that, in addition to providing services to those with the most urgent needs, QMUNITY will be a place to celebrate the colourful diversity of LGBTQ communities through art and social events, building deeper connections internally and with non-LGBTQ society.

QMUNITY was supported as having a central role in the new community centre and more

broadly throughout the LGBTQ community, both through its own programs but also by collaborating with and supporting other organizations and allied groups. Many cautioned QMUNITY to not overtax its own resources, and envisioned an important role as the facilitator of connections and cooperation between organizations. Creating appropriate, welcoming spaces so that community groups have access to the centre was seen as a critical component of centre management. An idea that arose often was that QMUNITY should play the role of a hub for services, information and connections. Rather than trying to meet all needs directly, QMUNITY would connect individuals with other organizations, lobby on their behalf and provide direct support in ensuring safe access to services.

There was considerable enthusiasm around the physical West End centre, but QMUNITY was also encouraged to create satellite spaces throughout the Lower Mainland and British Columbia, and to ensure that staffing and programming reach outside the West End. A related suggestion was that QMUNITY establish a strong virtual presence, and that technology needs for a BC-wide presence be considered in the design and function of the West End Centre.

The most important value highlighted by community members was creating a community centre inclusive of diverse and fluid gender and sexual identities as well as intersecting identities such as race, ethnicity, age and physical ability, among others. An inclusive

community centre would offer a wide range of programming and services, a physically accessible and welcoming space and representation of diverse identities through staffing, language and artwork.

While inclusion was seen as one of the predominant values promoted by QMUNITY, participants in all formats recognized that it can be challenging to achieve given the diverse communities that make up the broader LGBTQ community. There is a tension between offering programs focused on narrow interest groups and those open to everyone, and considerable discussion and sensitivity will be required to achieve a balance.

Participants also envisioned a centre that provides a safe space for community members who may be marginalized elsewhere, and strongly supported the idea of trauma-informed practices and programs. Celebration and remembrance, a community-engaged leadership and a focus on social and environmental justice were other values that an LGBTQ community centre should foster.

Health related services were the highest priority cited by community members in terms of the support they would like to receive through a QMUNITY-managed centre, especially for seniors, youth, Trans individuals, immigrants, Aboriginal people and those with disabilities. Specifically, there was strong support for expanding free counselling services and a health clinic, partnered with appropriate organizations.

The second highest support priority was access to services to support youth, marginalized, vulnerable and underserved populations, particularly meeting the needs of these groups that involve food, housing and employability. Programs and activities offering opportunities for socializing were also a central focus.

Other support services and activities highlighted by participants of the consultation process included a dedicated space for art and culture to be produced and displayed/performed, and advocacy around issues important to the LGBTQ community.

Changing demographics suggest that programming will need to increase to serve a number of groups, particularly seniors, newcomers, children and families, Trans individuals and Aboriginal and Two-Spirit people. The idea of mentoring came up repeatedly, with participants suggesting a range of situations that could extend the reach of QMUNITY well beyond its formal staff. Seniors with youth, long-term Canadians with newcomers, those who came out awhile ago with those just coming out and Trans individuals who have transitioned with those contemplating transitions were just some of the possible mentoring relationships identified.

When asked to prioritize education and taking action, participants responded with the general guideline that the highest priorities for QMUNITY should be accessibility, diversity, inclusion and reducing isolation. Two suggested taglines describe well the hoped-for

QMUNITY culture: “QMUNITY everywhere for everyone,” and “Stewards of Connection.” Cross-sector queer competency was seen as a significant area for activism. There was strong support to expand the existing Queer Competency Training to business, government, healthcare, seniors’ homes, schools, police, immigrant services and other sectors.

Health care was also identified by many as an ongoing priority for the LGBTQ community, through clinics, counselling services, trauma support, recreation classes and advocacy around LGBTQ issues. Housing and economic security, and human and civil rights, were seen as priorities for education and activism.

Youth were identified as one group for which it was important to tailor programs and services. Youth participants suggested a media room with a diversity of equipment and programs, a youth-specific drop-in space, a medical clinic and counselling services onsite with staffing and services focused on youth issues, a clothing swap and food bank and youth-specific support and referral services for housing, food, finances, mental health and addiction services, both in-house and online.

The QTIPOC (Queer, Trans and Intersex People of Colour) workshop participants expressed concern that QMUNITY is perceived as less welcoming because people of colour are not seen frequently enough among the leadership, board, staff and volunteers, and some were uneasy about how welcome they would feel in the community centre unless this issue is addressed. They also made the point that inclusion does not always mean everyone is

welcome everywhere, but that safe spaces and programs for specific groups are also a key component to an inclusive environment. Respecting and embracing different cultures and ways of talking/being/expressing is a valuable aspect of inclusion, particularly representations of non western-centered peoples.

Seniors who participated in our small group dialogue thought their community added particular value to the broad LGBTQ community as a resource, connecting to history as sharing lived experience. They saw youth mentoring seniors in the use of technology as an important intergenerational connector, while seniors could mentor youth in other areas. Programs and services around health and housing issues are the most critical need for seniors to support aging well. One participant noted that “*We haven’t been old before,*” asking for assistance navigating the healthcare system.

Accessibility was seen as a key value in the Trans small group dialogue, particularly for suburban and rural communities. Programs and services become out of reach because of travel distances, and decentralization is key to serving Trans as well as other LGBTQ communities. Inclusivity was another value important for the Trans community; gender identities should never be assumed, and identities such as asexual and non-binary often feel excluded.

Participants in the Aboriginal/Two-Spirit workshop voiced a strong interest in establishing new partnerships with QMUNITY. Such partnerships would be based on decolonized relationships and spaces, and would be built on ongoing and visible engagement of Aboriginal

and Two-Spirit people. Participants would like to see their traditional and ancestral lands recognized and art, culture, history, language and traditions respected and present at QMUNITY. Their hope is that those who come to QMUNITY would see themselves and their culture reflected through visual representation (art, building style/materials), but also through the way QMUNITY operates, including having Aboriginal staff running programs for Aboriginal people and seats on the board for Aboriginal or Two-Spirit representatives.

Participants in the Newcomers/Immigrants small group dialogue noted that they might not know what LGBTQ means, and that they are meant to be included, as they may not be familiar with the terms or relatively open culture in Canada compared to their home countries. For them, inclusion translates into finding out basic information about relevant communities, but also being able to come to QMUNITY without having to fit into an LGBTQ box, as their identities go beyond the existing categories.

There was a strong positive survey response to QMUNITY among those who knew of and had participated in programs and services. Those who hadn't participated in QMUNITY cited lack of awareness and programs/services being too far away as key reasons they hadn't participated. Some survey respondents also felt QMUNITY wasn't well known outside LGBTQ circles. As a result, some participants suggested that a BC-wide awareness campaign would be useful as the community centre progresses from the idea phase through construction.

Location as a barrier to participation also emerged as a survey theme. Respondents indicated that a strong virtual presence and service delivery outside of the West End would be highly desirable, similar to other feedback from the Building QMUNITY consultation.

Youth services were considered the single most important aspect of QMUNITY's programming in the survey, followed by a cluster of STI testing and education, information and referral services, advocacy and support for Trans communities. The survey outcomes did not disagree with other Building QMUNITY consultations, but the importance of art and culture, recreation and direct support for families were more prominent in the all-day dialogue and small group dialogues. The survey respondents did note that QMUNITY should provide sports and recreation programming, but the considerable number and range of organizations listed by respondents that already provide sports and recreation activities suggest that area is reasonably well covered by other groups.

## Introduction

QMUNITY has served BC's LGBTQ communities for 36 years. In December 2013, QMUNITY was awarded a \$10 million grant to develop a new, purpose-built, 10,000 square foot facility. This public space will anchor LGBTQ communities and be a powerful tool to create inclusion and belonging.

As QMUNITY looks to the future and building their new facility they wanted to learn more about how their clients, volunteers, donors, community partners and other stakeholders view their programs and services and role in the community. QMUNITY partnered with the Centre for Dialogue to conduct this community-wide consultation. Some guiding questions included:

- What does QMUNITY do well?
- Where is there room for improvement?
- What are the critical issues facing LGBTQ communities in BC?
- What would QMUNITY stakeholders like to see the organization deliver in the years to come?
- What are the other organizations and services that are also essential to LGBTQ communities in Vancouver/ the Lower Mainland/ BC?

The *Building QMUNITY* project was designed to identify the needs, strengths and resources of LGBTQ communities. The project included feedback from community partners, scoping interviews with stakeholders, a one day

community-wide public dialogue, small dialogue sessions with focused LGBTQ communities, and a survey (online and paper-based).

An advisory committee for the *Building QMUNITY* project was established in January 2015 to help guide QMUNITY and ensure all voices were included in the planning, development and launch of the new space. The advisory committee was made up of representatives of project partners and QMUNITY board and staff members. Partner organizations included HIM (Health Initiative for Men), Vancouver Coastal Health, THIP/Prism (Trans Health Information Program), Femme City Choir, PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), LOUD Business Association, Vancouver Public Library, Trans Alliance Society, Queer Arts Festival, Out On Screen, Quirk-e, Rainbow Refugee, BOLDfest, Catherine White Holman Wellness Centre, Our City of Colours, AIDS Vancouver, Vancouver Pride Society, Dancing Two Eagle Spirit Society, Pinoy Pride, Gay and Grey, Dr. Peter Center, CampOUT!, YouthCo, and BCRAD (British Columbian Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf).

The following report includes the three major components of the community consultation; the opening daylong dialogue, the small group dialogue workshops, and the survey. We then present general conclusions for QMUNITY to consider as it begins the exciting process of planning British Columbia's new LGBTQ community centre.



# *BUILDING QMUNITY* CONSULTATION DIALOGUE

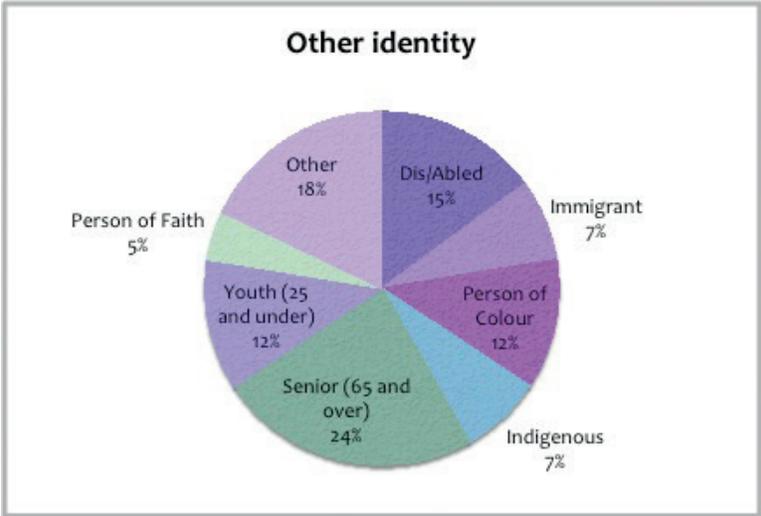
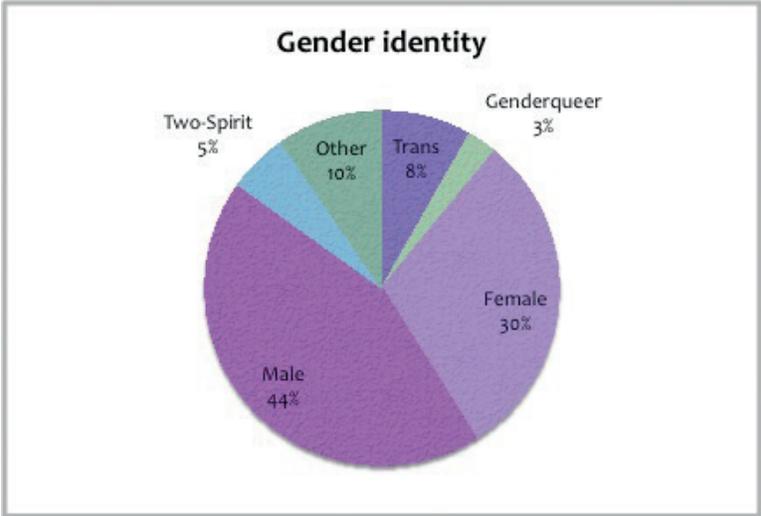
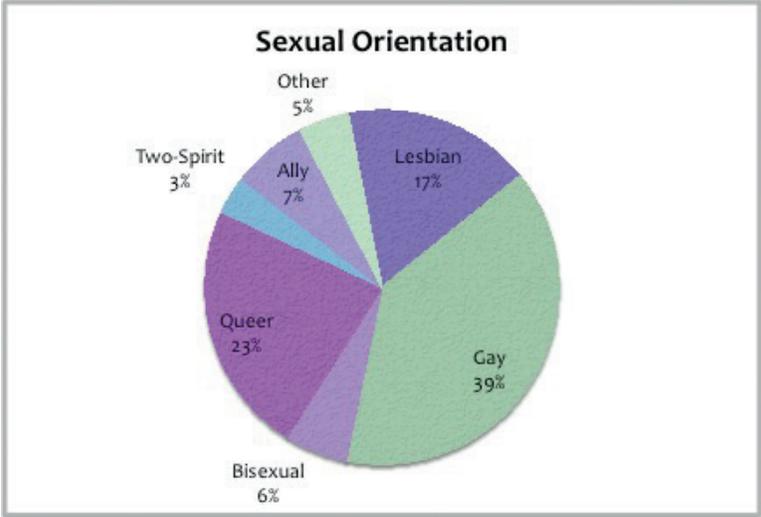
To kick off the *Building QMUNITY* consultation, QMUNITY hosted a full day, interactive consultation dialogue on May 27, 2015 at Simon Fraser University's Segal Building in downtown Vancouver. During this dialogue 70 community members and 25 volunteers, media, and QMUNITY staff engaged in a structured format designed to explore QMUNITY's role in the LGBTQ community and provide guidance to initiate planning for the future of QMUNITY and its new facility.

Participants at the dialogue were recruited through the organizations represented on the Advisory Committee as well as through an open call for public registrants. One-third of the available spots were distributed through key QMUNITY partner organizations to ensure representation from all the LGBTQ communities with the remainder of the seats open for public registration (advertised widely through QMUNITY's extensive network).

Participants at the *Building QMUNITY* dialogue represented both a breadth of LGBTQ communities and a broad demographic range. The majority of participants, 83%, were from Metro Vancouver, with the remaining percentage from Greater Vancouver. Participants were asked to voluntarily self-identify when registering and the charts below indicate participants' responses regarding their sexual orientation and gender and other identities.

Participants were seated at tables of ten, organized to ensure that each table had a wide diversity of representatives. Table assignments were shifted for the last breakout group to increase the range of interactions during the day. The agenda included a plenary keynote, three breakout group discussions and a concluding plenary. Facilitators for each breakout group were recruited through QMUNITY and the Advisory Board, and participated in a training session prior to the event. Note takers were QMUNITY and Centre for Dialogue staff.

Each breakout session concluded with a short reporting out to the plenary, and extensive notes and flipchart assignments were collected from each table and used to capture the richness of breakout group discussions. The *Building QMUNITY* consultation dialogue was conducted by Chatham House Rule; participants were free to use the information they heard, but were asked to refrain from attributing information and/or statements to participants.



## AGENDA

9:30: Opening

10:00: Breakout I:  
Positive and Affirming Moments

10:20: Keynote Presentation,  
Maura Lawless, Executive Director  
The 519, Toronto

11:25: Breakout II: Values

12:25: Lunch

13:10: Breakout III:  
Connecting and Getting Support

14:25: Breakout IV:  
Learning and Taking Action

15:50: Plenary Discussion

16:30: End

## Positive and Affirming Moments

### BREAKOUT 1

(Word maps were developed based on the frequency each word was mentioned in the written submissions by participants)

*What was a particularly positive or affirmative moment you have experienced in LGBTQ communities?*

To open the dialogue and inspire thinking about QMUNITY's future as BC's Queer Resource Centre and its new facility, participants were asked to recall and share particularly positive and affirmative moments they had experienced in LGBTQ communities.

### *Personal turning points*

Many of the positive or affirming moments recounted were described as "first times", including experiences of coming out, or the first positive experience as an LGBTQ person. These moments generally occurred the first time they entered a dedicated LGBTQ space, or at events created by and for the queer community, and were often described as turning points or thresholds, moving from a sense of isolation to a sense of community, experiencing a level of acceptance and representation previously thought impossible.

*"Because I belong to the queer community, I have a home"*



Participants noted that the lives of LGBTQ individuals often involve moments of discovering identity and coming out, and that QMUNITY can be a key resource in providing connection and support during those important moments.

### *Connection and community*

LGBTQ events, activities and spaces were valued for providing opportunities to feel included in a community, connected to others and to build friendships or romantic relationships. Throughout the dialogue there was a strong emphasis on inclusion and social activities.

Public events were described as opportunities to feel connected to the wider community, and a way of celebrating meaningful personal moments. One participant, for instance, described the Vancouver Pride Parade as her yearly way of coming out, while another participant described how a same-sex marriage advocacy event in 2000 became a moving celebration of her relationship with her partner when community members made them a wedding cake. Other participants described significant experiences connecting with international LGBTQ communities through events like the New York Queer Film Festival, as well as LGBTQ events that facilitated intergenerational connections (honouring elders and being inspired by youth).

*“I thought that I was the only gay person in the world”*

*“... an instance that I never imagined would have been possible in my time as a young, closeted gay man in suburbia”*

### *Representation and visibility*

Many participants described how affirming it is to feel their gender and sexual identities represented in LGBTQ spaces, and also in spaces and platforms that have traditionally discriminated against or excluded LGBTQ people such as sports, films or public spaces. One participant described having the crowd cheer on their float in the Vancouver Pride Parade as *“an intense moment of pride and visibility.”* Another participant described a joyous moment of *“taking over the whole lane”* while biking towards a Pride drag baseball event—reclaiming and re-defining the public realm. This echoes the emphasis on celebration and pride in later sections of the dialogue.

*“first time feeling supported, inspired, and valued”*

### *Connecting through other identities and interests*

While feeling represented and part of a community was often described in terms of participants' gender or sexual identity, there was also a strong emphasis on connecting around intersecting identities such as race, physical ability and age, and around similar interests like sports, arts or careers. This spoke to the desire to be seen as a whole individual and the recurring theme of intersectionality throughout the dialogue.

*“I have a space to live, people to talk to and I am not alone anymore”*

Peer support groups were described as important spaces for improving LGBTQ lives by sharing experiences, acknowledging barriers and receiving support for coping with difficult experiences or circumstances, such as being HIV positive.

*“First day in Vancouver 6 years ago—post office worker does not bat an eyelash when my girlfriend fills out government forms with her preferred pronouns and takes good care of us to reroute our mail”*

In many cases, LGBTQ programs offer uniquely safe spaces to engage in activities without fearing rejection or abuse based on gender or sexual identities. One participant described his first time realizing *“you could be gay and do sports,”* bringing up the important perception that for many being openly queer or Trans becomes a barrier for physical fitness. In the keynote, Maura Lawless described how The 519 (an LGBTQ-centred city agency in Toronto) is starting to address fitness issues in Toronto with a new LGBTQ recreational facility. One participant described feeling welcomed in a queer-inclusive sports team, suggesting that advocacy and education can build capacity for inclusion and safety in other community groups and spaces.

Many participants described the positive experiences they had while engaging in artistic activities, with some describing public arts events as their point of entry or discovery of LGBTQ communities. This was echoed in a recurring call for arts-based programs for recreation, healing and celebrating identity.

*“It was the FIRST time I was in a room with other queers who had more than just sexuality in common with me. We had bold memory, spirituality, and racialization in common”*

### *Safe and supportive spaces*

Another hallmark of the experiences participants described as positive or affirming was a sense of safety. Nearly a dozen participants described Vancouver as a safe, supportive and comfortable home in comparison to less accepting places in Canada and abroad. Some described Vancouver as less hetero-normative; a place where they felt included or celebrated, not just accommodated. Vancouver’s popularity as a safe haven became particularly important when discussing QMUNITY’s demographics and future needs.

*“Being a gay male knitter, having the safety of going to QMUNITY and being myself, affirms my worth and dignity”*

Several people recalled being received with a warm welcome during their first time in an LGBTQ space or group. This underscores the importance of first impressions on newcomers who may enter a space feeling more vulnerable than regular participants. Participants emphasized the importance of staff and facilitators defining and modeling clear and respectful group interactions such as respecting differing opinions and boundaries, accepting fluid or non-binary identities and making space to admit and learn from mistakes.

Some participants described moments where they received health, legal, housing, settlement, or other social supports through LGBTQ-focused programs. This speaks to the barriers and discrimination many LGBTQ individuals face when seeking to fulfill these needs in the wider community despite Vancouver being more welcoming than other places. These anecdotes echoed participants' later discussions on the importance of queer competency training for professionals in non-LGBTQ settings along with QMUNITY's role in helping the community access safe services and supports within the centre or through referrals. "The organizers took a moment to welcome everyone and also to speak about the importance of respect and consent and boundaries interacting with others that evening. Attending to safety makes a difference."

### *Community Service and Social Change*

Many participants described their involvement in volunteer work within LGBTQ communities, or advocating for LGBTQ issues in the wider community. Examples include: helping an advertising agency with a publicity campaign

on understanding transitions; volunteering at events; facilitating peer support groups; and experiences of solidarity during the AIDS crisis.

Community service provides a space for developing connections, experiencing deep solidarity and fostering an environment of giving back. A couple of participants directly mentioned volunteer experiences at QMUNITY as their positive or affirming anecdote—this passion for engagement and community service is important for QMUNITY to remember as it gathers resources for the new centre.

*"Being trusted with client stories and experiences makes me feel like a contributing part of the community"*

*"I came to QMUNITY looking for a support group, and in meeting with the volunteer coordinator, it was suggested I start one! Felt very included and acknowledged"*

Many participants described seeing positive change within the wider community over the past few decades as a result of advocacy work. In particular, participants emphasized improvements within public attitudes and cultural norms, as opposed to policy change, suggesting that grassroots cultural change is as equally important a focus for advocacy work as top-down change.

Some participants also described their involvement with LGBTQ archival and historical projects as affirming or empowering, echoing several suggestions throughout the dialogue of creating an oral history project, archive, or other similar initiatives to commemorate the challenges and successes the LGBTQ communities have experienced and recording the legacy of the older generation.

*“As a peer support facilitator [in a Winnipeg conference] I was able to share my gay orientation, as well as my HIV+ status, and this was very well accepted. Winnipeg is my hometown, where I experienced childhood abuse and this gave me the hope and strength to be able to speak as myself”*

*“What makes Ireland’s victory nice is the will of the people; it wasn’t what the government says, it’s what people said.”*

*“I thought that I was the only gay person in the world, in 1950s in Denmark [...] but nowadays every family has an LGBTQ member. I’m happy for young people today; they can live an almost normal life”*

## **Maura Lawless: Toronto’s 519 Centre**

### **KEYNOTE PRESENTATION**

The keynote was delivered by Maura Lawless, Executive Director of The 519, an LGBTQ-centred city agency in Toronto. The 519 has 2900 formal members and receives over 265,000 visits yearly, including 230 community groups that use their free space for meetings and programs. She offered insights based on The 519’s experience with space design, defining the role and management of a queer resource centre, and developing resources to ensure ongoing success.

### *Adaptive and appealing space design*

Designing accessible and adaptable space—offering large and small rooms that are open, agile and flexible—is critical. It’s important that the Centre consider future changes in technology and demographics in order for it to be defined as a long-term investment and community legacy.

Lawless discussed one consideration that participants also emphasized during the subsequent dialogue on key values for QMUNITY—environmental sustainability. She indicated there were few environmentally sustainable practices implemented in the original 519 Centre, and they are being more intentional about addressing this aspect of construction and function when designing a new recreation space.

Lawless also recommended that community centre space be connected to the street and

appealing to passersby. At the 519 there is a welcoming common area, family resource centre, and social enterprise restaurant at street level that invite people to come in. She stressed that a well-maintained and clean building is important so that community members—especially the most marginalized—can feel proud of the space and empowered by it. *“When space is beautiful, people take better care of it,”* she said, *“It imparts a sense of respect and worth.”*

### *Clear and adaptable mandate*

Being mindful about the centre’s role and developing a clear mandate for its work has also been a key element for The 519, while allowing this mandate to change over time in response to community needs. For example, The 519 has adopted the tagline “Space for Change” that communicates in a literal sense the building’s flexible design but also encompasses its support for progressive values and social change, its outreach work in the broader community, its advocacy work in spaces of public and political discourse, its commitment to self-reflection and growth as an organization, and its ability to evolve to changing and emerging community needs.

The 519 has found itself addressing emerging needs that include Trans rights, settlement services for LGBTQ newcomers and refugees, and offering allyship around issues of racism.

The 519’s current central project is building the first inclusive sports and recreation facility dedicated to combatting barriers to physical activity that impact LGBTQ people’s health and wellness. The facility will be coupled with a

policy institute and Sport Inclusion Summit to work with government, partners and thought leaders from around the world to develop an action plan for improving community health. Branding terms include “Be a Good Sport,” “Change the Game” and “There Are No Sidelines.”

Another emerging focus has been developing trauma-informed practices and programs for the centre in order to better understand trauma and respond to its effects on both community members and staff. The goal is to create *“spaces that build on the principles of safety, inclusiveness, and participation for the many members of our community who are living with the consequences of trauma—we want them to feel comfortable, protected and safe.”* The 519 is working with the City of Toronto and St. Michael’s Hospital to develop a framework and a set of best practices that could be shared with other organizations.

In addition, The 519 has been advocating for a systemic response to homelessness—an issue that disproportionately affects LGBTQ youth. This topic was also brought up by participants in the Q&A and ensuing dialogue as being a major issue in Vancouver. The 519 was unsuccessful in their proposal for a dedicated city-run queer shelter, but has been working at a policy level with the municipal government and community partners to improve safe access to shelter and housing for queer and Trans identified people. A Housing Support Worker was added to the centre’s staff and their advocacy efforts have helped create two privately run shelters for LGBTQ communities.

## *Community-led Programming*

Lawless shared some successful strategies that The 519 has employed to satisfy diverse and competing community needs within a limited budget. It is the first City-run agency where a volunteer Board of Directors controls the programming, allowing it to evolve and reflect community needs. They hire staff with diverse strengths, perspectives and experiences to connect with different communities.

Functionally, The 519 operates services of their own but also provides free space to applicant organizations ranging from ballroom dancing to tax clinics to legal services. They created a Space Use Policy through which groups led by community volunteers can apply to book a free room with decisions guided by one core criterion: does the organization and program or service broadly advance issues of LGBTQ inclusion? These programs are often the first point of contact with the centre and act as a gateway to membership, volunteer resources, and political and financial support.

## *Sustainable Resource Development*

Lawless stressed the importance of creating a strategic resource development plan with diverse streams of funding to ensure that the organization is free to set its own priorities, meet community needs and provide programs and services “on your own terms and your own timelines” without the pressures of waiting for grant approvals or constantly chasing funding.

The 519 is fortunate to be one of ten centres that receive stable operating funding from the

municipal government. This funding model has allowed them to focus other revenue sources on programs and services and provide open and accessible space for communities.

When asked how the centre maintains its independence while receiving government funding, Lawless explained that The 519 governance structure includes a Board of Directors appointed by the organization’s members. The Directors are given some autonomy to define programming directions. Further, by providing free and accessible space to community groups they are able to indirectly support advocacy around political issues without the centre having to take an official stance on every issue.

The 519 appointed a Fundraising Manager who helped develop a 5-year strategic resource development plan. They have tripled their revenue since 2008 by fundraising through direct mail, third party events, corporate partnerships, and sponsorships.

When asked for advice on building strong financial support from the community, Lawless described having a diverse donor base and concentrating on building long-term, lasting relationships with all supporters—including valuing other forms of support such as volunteer time. She said it is important to leverage community networks to find “key people who can be champions for the community.” In their next 5-year plan they will be looking more intentionally at opportunities for legacy funding.

Finally, The 519’s social enterprises are significant community resources, including the

Fabarnak restaurant and catering service that employs marginalized LGBTQ youth and an Education and Training Department that offers workshops, training, and consulting services and employs individuals who identify as Trans. These services are not run as for-profit businesses, but generate employment for individuals who experience discrimination, create revenue to support programs, and make connections with the broader community.

## Values

### BREAKOUT 2

*Which values would you like to see reflected in QMUNITY programming?*

*What will a QMUNITY facility look like when reflecting this value?*

*What should QMUNITY do to implement this value into the culture of the new facility?*

People come to QMUNITY with different hopes and expectations as to which values should guide the design of the new facility as well as the programming and activities that will animate the space.

### Inclusion

The most prominent value highlighted by breakout groups was *inclusion*, not only in creating a community centre inclusive of diverse and fluid gender and sexual identities, but also of intersecting identities such as race, ethnicity, age and physical ability, among others. Inclusion was also discussed as a means of building connections to allies and proactively making the physical space safe for those facing barriers such as dis/abilities, mental health issues, and poverty.

Inclusion was such a fundamental value that the other key values and suggestions participants proposed were closely related: creating a safe space, fostering pride and visibility, and collaborative leadership.

Participants identified some specific features of the centre that would foster inclusion:



### **Wide range of programming and services**

Participants highlighted organizing programs and services to meet the needs and interests of the various LGBTQ communities. They noted that inclusion is often manifested through programs that encourage connections between diverse individuals, such as multi-cultural or intergenerational activities. However, inclusion can also mean providing exclusive space, especially for systemically marginalized groups like Queer, Trans and Intersex People of Colour and Aboriginal and/or Two-Spirit individuals.

### **Welcoming space**

Participants echoed Maura Lawless' recommendation of creating a beautiful, clean and multi-functional space. They suggested décor that feels homey or comfortable—not “*too corporate*,” but rather like a “*living room*.” They would also like to feel a sense of pride in a community centre that positively represents LGBTQ culture to broader society. Having greeters at a reception desk or an “*everyone is welcome*” sign could also communicate a sense of invitation.

### **Accessible space and programming**

There was a strong emphasis on ensuring that the space is physically accessible to all, including individuals with visual or hearing impairments and those with less visible disabilities. The centre should also be financially accessible for all; offering some free programming and social services, and have a sliding scale for payment for other programs. Finally, participants discussed strategies to make the space socially accessible, such as building

inclusive washrooms, offering drop-in groups, and hosting a mix of programs (some of which would define participants narrowly). They also acknowledged that while a visible and celebratory main entrance is important, some community members may require a more discreet side door to access the space comfortably.

### **Representation of different identities**

Social accessibility also encompasses a mandate for diverse members of LGBTQ communities to feel represented in the space. Suggestions included ensuring that staff members reflect community diversity, offering multilingual signs and resources, and having a multilingual welcome sign at the entrance. Naming the centre with an appropriate Coast Salish First Nations name was mentioned at many of the breakout tables. Photographs, murals and other art could also represent identities that are often marginalized in mainstream media. However, participants recommended being mindful of stereotypes in visual images, finding a way to convey diversity without tokenizing.

Representation of Aboriginal identities was a frequent theme, made real by involving First Nations in all stages of planning. One suggestion was to make a formal request to First Nations governments for permission to build the centre on their traditional territory, while other suggestions included a Coast Salish name and naming ceremony and incorporating First Nations art and iconography within the building. QMUNITY was encouraged: to hire Aboriginal staff in positions beyond Aboriginal Support Workers; to provide cultural competency to staff and volunteers; to collaborate

with Aboriginal organizations to provide programming from an Aboriginal perspective; and to build capacity in remote communities.

### **Outreach**

Finally, participants proposed that QMUNITY have an outward orientation—bringing programs and services *to* communities instead of waiting for people to come to the centre. A sense of inclusion could be extended through collaborations with different organizations and institutions or through a street-level social enterprise restaurant that could act as a connection point between QMUNITY and communities.

### ***Safety & Wellness***

Another central value participants envisioned for a queer community centre was to provide a safe space for individuals who may be excluded or experience discrimination elsewhere. Breakout group participants recommended setting clear expectations, guidelines and/or community agreements for all staff and community members who use the space. The centre could also provide focused workshops on anti-oppression, or around issues that affect particular groups (such as those who identify as Trans) to foster a positive, respectful and non-judgmental atmosphere in the centre.

Participants supported the idea of implementing trauma-informed practices and programs, perhaps drawing from The 519's current work. Ideas for trauma care included: expanded mental health services, art-based therapy, a healing garden, and intentional heart-centred

spaces to engage with emotions and vulnerabilities.

Other strategies for supporting an expanded sense of mental, physical and emotional wellness included physical recreation programs, arts programs, social programs to break isolation, and a wide scope of services to address basic needs, assist people through difficult life transitions, and build capacity.

### ***Celebration & Remembrance***

Many participants spoke of fostering a sense of celebration, pride and visibility to counter-balance negative attitudes and silencing faced by LGBTQ individuals and communities. Participating in events such as the Vancouver Pride Parade, and having a visible and celebratory street-level entrance were described as ways to establish a physical and public presence that helps communities say “we’re here.”

Some participants also suggested initiatives to honour and value the heritage, achievements and history of LGBTQ communities. Ideas included building a library of archival pieces, intergenerational dialogues or mentorship programs, displaying art from local queer artists, and creating a memorial for lost generations—those who blazed the trails for the rights later generations enjoy.

### ***Community-engaged Leadership***

A priority among many breakout group participants was the establishing of a transparent, accountable and engaged governance structure for the centre. Participants spoke of defining governance that is clearly and consistently

publicly communicated and articulates an approach of outreach and collaboration with other entities. They also expressed a need for this mandate to be flexible and future-oriented, allowing the centre to remain responsive to the communities it serves. The centre should not try and do all things, but rather leverage partnerships and collaborate with existing and new community organizations.

Many participants throughout the dialogue called for ongoing opportunities for community members to be involved in planning the centre. Suggestions included creating a community advisory committee, hosting focus groups, and having a diverse board in the planning stages. Maintaining engagement after the centre is established would be done through community-driven programming, the establishment of an ongoing advisory board, and openness to feedback and criticism. Participants acknowledged that disagreement and contentious issues may surface through community-engaged processes, but they believe the centre should value feedback and be an open space for dialogue that invites non-dominant voices and encourages non-violent communication and mutual respect.

Participants stressed the need to pro-actively invite diverse voices to the table, described as "*centering the edges*"; by bringing individuals who are most discriminated against to the centre and welcoming them to participate in the programming and decision-making processes. Hearing from those facing multiple barriers could help ensure accessibility for the majority of the centre's users. Including diverse voices should be done without

tokenizing groups, or assuming that only one or two individuals represent an entire community.

Participants also emphasized that the centre should demonstrate its commitment to community accountability by maintaining transparency in its governance structure and its finances and decision-making process. They suggested making meeting minutes and budgets publically available. Some participants recommended basing decisions, programs, methodology and by-laws on evidence-based research. And finally, while participants saw the need to develop consistent and sustainable funding from diverse sources, they spoke of the importance of maintaining integrity by only accepting funds from sources that reflect the community's values and by working within the structure of social enterprise ventures.

### *Social and Environmental Justice*

A major focus throughout the discussion on values was remaining committed to furthering social justice and environmental sustainability. Participants saw QMUNITY as playing an active role in advocacy for LGBTQ issues within society at large through workshops and outreach to make other spaces queer-friendly. They focused particularly on ways the centre could promote social justice *within* the centre.

For instance, many participants felt that there is still work to be done in terms of building understanding, mutual respect and bonds between different groups within LGBTQ communities. Alongside identity-focused programs the centre could host events and programs that bring together individuals from

different sexual orientations, gender and other identities. Further, the centre could offer opportunities for members to learn about anti-oppression practices, inclusive language and the issues faced by particular groups, such as Trans individuals, First Nations, people of colour, immigrants, and physically or otherwise disabled.

One breakout group suggested that QMUNITY support reconciliation and redemption, allowing community members to grow and learn from their mistakes by “calling in as opposed to calling out.” These values could be put in practice through an organizational culture committed to self-reflection, progressive practices and correcting mistakes.

Finally, participants described multiple strategies for sustainability that could be implemented in the new building, such as using clean energy sources, encouraging waste diversion and energy conservation, and incorporating green space in a garden or green roof.



## Connecting and Getting Support

### BREAKOUT 3

*What communities have what needs?*

*What might these programs look like?*

*What needs would be best addressed by or in collaboration with other organizations?*

*Who isn't represented? What are their needs?*

*What services will be needed or changed in 10 years?*

Two areas of focus in QMUNITY's work centre on connecting individuals with each other, and connecting individuals with direct support services. Current programming fosters community connections by including social activities organized by self-facilitated groups that bring those with similar interests together. QMUNITY's more direct services range from health clinics and counselling to seniors support and youth drop-in programming.

When asked to identify priorities for QMUNITY's future programming, participants stressed that different, but intersecting, LGBTQ communities would have particular needs in the new centre. These communities include: specific age populations, ethnic and cultural backgrounds (immigrants, people of color, indigenous people, communities of faith), people with disabilities, families and allies, “closeted” individuals, marginalized or underserved communities (homeless, youth in care, sex trade workers, people in the justice system) and various identities within the

gender and sexuality spectrums. Participants particularly noted that the centre should be a place that provides connections and services for those most traumatized.

While participants acknowledged that the centre cannot be “*everything to everybody*,” they suggested strategies that could help meet diverse and competing needs:

- Proactive hiring so that staff at the centre reflect the diversity of all LGBTQ communities.
- Periodic consultations with communities to identify their evolving and emerging needs.
- Proactive outreach through organizations that serve a range of populations such as schools, immigrant settlement services, First Nations and Aboriginal organizations (e.g. Urban Native Youth Association and Friendship Centres).
- Build capacity by offering free space and administrative and technology resources (mailboxes, photocopiers, computers, Wi-Fi, screen and projector, etc.).
- Track and equalize the extent of programs, services and resources offered to different groups, particularly within the gender and sexuality spectrum.

### ***Health and Wellness Services***

The top priority item cited by participants is the offering of health services through the centre, especially for seniors, youth, individuals who identify as Trans, those with disabilities, immigrants and Aboriginal people. Apart from professional health services, participants

suggested programs that could support overall wellness. These programs would include nutrition and sexual education, indoor and outdoor physical activity. Participants also wanted to see accessibility to a quiet space for mindfulness and meditation.

### **Counselling**

There was strong support for the continuation and expansion of the existing free counselling services to include long-term counselling, multi-lingual services and shorter wait periods for consultations. Participants mentioned needing support around issues such as: addiction, abuse, assault, trauma, mental health, chronic illness, bereavement, and coming out. Ancillary support services were suggested such as having a crisis line available, art-based therapy sessions, and drop-in peer support groups facilitated by volunteers in response to community needs.

### **Health clinic**

Currently QMUNITY houses two clinics—a naturopathic clinic, and an STI clinic (Bute Street) that offers free, anonymous, on-site STI testing. However both of these are only accessible via a flight of stairs. Some participants suggested expanding these clinics to include an LGBTQ-friendly health clinic with better access for people with disabilities, having a nurse or doctor available for general consultations beyond sexual health, and offering more support for Trans health and transitions in particular.

Suggested partnerships for such a clinic included Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH),

Health Initiative for Men (HIM) and the Catherine White Holman Wellness Centre (a holistic healthcare centre for transgender and gender-diverse communities). The clinic could house volunteers with training from Vancouver's Basics for Health Society (<http://www.basicsforhealthsociety.ca>) to help connect community members to healthcare services. The clinic could also be supported by the Sanctuary City movement which provides essential services to undocumented immigrants, particularly LGBTQ refugees.

### *Daily Living Support*

The second highest priority identified by the group was access to queer-friendly services to support young, marginalized, vulnerable and underserved populations with their daily living needs such as food, housing and employability. Services that participants felt could be housed within QMUNITY included:

- Community kitchen
- Community garden and gardening classes
- Pay phone/fax
- Showers/grooming areas
- Computer lab with internet access
- A thrift shop (book swaps, clothing swaps, home item exchange)

Other programs and services were proposed as collaborative efforts between QMUNITY and existing organizations or professional volunteers, including:

- Housing assistance (BC Housing, Non-Profit Housing, market rentals)

- Food programs (community kitchens)
- Healthcare (Positive Living, community health clinics, queer-friendly health providers)
- Financial advising
- Legal advice
- Social workers
- Community centres

### **Resource and Information Hub**

Many participants suggested having a visible and accessible information and resource hub located at the centre to act as a first point of contact for individuals wishing to access LGBTQ resources, referrals and social services. This information and resource hub would also be accessible online and via telephone inquiries, and could include a Pink Pages catalogue of queer-friendly groups, organizations, events and services. Staff and/or volunteer support would be available to help navigate these services.

### **Employment support**

Inspired by The 519 keynote, the participants were in support of the idea of starting a social enterprise as a source of revenue, the primary focus of which would be to act as an employment opportunity for youth or those facing barriers to employment. One proposal was to start a Q-Café at street level, which would additionally create a space for the wider community to connect with the centre. "Revenue" might not equate "profit," however; The 519 in Toronto doesn't necessarily turn a profit each year.

Other ideas for employment support included hosting networking opportunities for young queer professionals, as well as workshops around how to come out at work. Youth could be further supported in developing careers through tutoring, leadership programs, internships and LGBTQ scholarships and bursaries (potentially created in partnership with universities). Support for sex workers was also identified as a need—in particular, non-stigmatizing, non-judgmental support driven by peers around harm reduction and supporting transition to other work (if so desired).

### *Social supports and connections*

Programs and activities offering opportunities for socializing were also a central focus. Many participants suggested including a tasteful, comfortable drop-in space for socializing and relaxing in an informal and supportive environment. Drop-in was seen as serving the needs of individuals who seek a safe space even when there is no tailored program for them at the time. It also acts as a central space to reconnect the diverse communities that share the centre. Ideas for the room—some described it as a community living room—include having comfortable furniture (like bean bag chairs), snacks, Wi-Fi and power plugs, movable and collapsible walls, and an outdoor space, perhaps with a barbeque.

Mentorship programs were proposed repeatedly, particularly to facilitate intergenerational connections or to engage with newcomers. Youth mentorship could focus on career development and life skills training that follow a Big Brothers-type model.

### *Arts and Culture*

Many participants expressed a desire for a dedicated space that would provide year-round queer arts opportunities that go beyond the annual festivals and events. This idea was seen as serving other identified needs including providing a space for socializing, connecting queer artists, celebrating LGBTQ heritage and supporting healing and trauma recovery.

Suggestions for the building included a dedicated space for art workshops, a gallery for local LGBTQ art, a room with a piano, and a theatre or other suitable space that could be used for rehearsals and performances and non-arts events such as educational seminars. Suggested programs and services include funding or support for grant writing, arts-based mentorship, community art projects like murals, a queer choir, and projects celebrating LGBTQ history or intersecting identities. For Aboriginal, Two-Spirit or QTPOC community members in particular, cultural needs include programs around language sharing, and reclaiming and celebrating cultures.

One potential partner that participants mentioned was WEArts—a community group that has hosted community forums led by Judith Marcuse to develop a detailed West End Art Plan, which will advise Vancouver city council on arts-related facilities and programming in Vancouver's West End. The process included strong representation of LGBTQ communities and surfaced similar requests like theatre, gallery and studio spaces.

## *Outreach Programs*

There was a strong focus in most breakout groups on extending QMUNITY's services and mission to those who cannot access a downtown centre directly. "QMUNITY Everywhere" was a suggested tag line. Ideas included a vertical outreach program, home visits, offering programs in apartment common rooms, and continuing the existing program of visiting queer seniors in long-term-care facilities and senior homes.

Participants strongly recommended reaching out to LGBTQ communities outside of Vancouver and throughout BC via satellite locations, the increased use of an online platform and virtual communications, and capacity building for local LGBTQ organizations in other areas. Ideas include hosting webinars, offering safe and mutually beneficial mentorship programs, hiring a visiting QMUNITY worker, and partnerships with province-wide institutions such as health authorities. Google chats, remote learning and teaching, a virtual art gallery, mentoring seniors on how to use new technologies and creating an online internet café were some additional ideas mentioned throughout the day.

## *Advocacy, Activism, and Education*

There is strong support for continuing advocacy, activism and education programs currently offered by QMUNITY and the expansion of these resources through partnerships with other organization that address LGBTQ issues, or other social issues affecting communities such as poverty, homelessness and food security.

Participants discussed QMUNITY as a future leader for respectful dialogues around LGBTQ issues, perhaps in the role of an ombudsman that listens to the needs and concerns of the community and communicates on their behalf within the political sphere and institutions, ensuring that queer voices are heard and issues are addressed. Another suggestion was to host an annual advocacy and activism laboratory or conference that focuses on a different theme each year.

## *Future changes*

Core focus areas such as mental health services, resource and referral services, arts, social spaces and advocacy continued to be seen as priorities. However, participants foresee shifts based on changing demographics, societal changes and capacity.

## **Seniors**

Participants prioritized programs and services that center on meeting the needs of a growing population of seniors. The biggest issue identified is helping seniors access LGBTQ-friendly senior homes and long-term care facilities, as many seniors find themselves "*pushed back into the closet*" when seeking housing. Ideas include education and advocacy for staff and clients in senior's housing, outreach visits, or supporting the construction of LGBTQ-inclusive housing.

Other cited needs for seniors included access to social programs to reduce isolation, advocacy around senior's abuse, support around mobility issues, financial planning and palliative care. Participants also recommended QMUNITY

invite seniors to support the centre as volunteers, mentors or legacy funders. Gay and Gray discussion groups, mobility assistance and outreach to seniors' homes were mentioned as possible ways of including seniors. Finally, breakout groups suggested that the centre engage ageing generations in projects (perhaps in partnership with local universities) around archiving and celebrating LGBTQ history, such as memoir writing or oral history projects. Another option would be to establish a living library where groups could book time to speak with an elder.

### **Newcomers**

Another shifting demographic that participants considered was the increasing number of LGBTQ immigrants and refugees seeking asylum in Vancouver from discrimination or persecution—people who may need support in settlement and transplant services, legal support, language training, employment services or trauma care. Potential partners included Rainbow Refugees, as well as immigrant and refugee organizations that could expand their service to include LGBTQ newcomers. Programs and services in the centre will have to increasingly consider multilingual needs and culturally-inclusive approaches. Outreach will be important to ensure that newcomers are aware of the centre.

### **Children and families**

One positive change that will impact needed programs and services is increasing social acceptance of the LGBTQ identities and culture. Participants highlighted that queer and Trans people will be coming out at younger

ages, creating more demand for support throughout their lifespans.

While there currently is a gap in programming for children, participants noted that children would not typically have independent access to the centre. School outreach programs and promotion of gay-straight alliances could help reach children who are not yet out to their families, or who are out but not receiving family support.

There was a call for family-oriented programming in the centre in order to support families of LGBTQ individuals and the increasing number of same-sex parents. The future will include more family patterns: Trans kids with straight parents, queer parents with straight kids, families with one LGBTQ and one straight parent and many others. Ideas that address the needs of diverse families included: childcare, parenting workshops, relationship workshops and counselling, and peer support groups and resources for parents, siblings and children. One suggested partner was PFLAG Vancouver (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). Many participants also noted a gap in available support workers, social groups, and programming that serves adults aged 26+ who are ageing out of youth programs.

Intergenerational programming was also encouraged that would help connect isolated youth with isolated seniors in a mutually beneficial and safe way, and as a way to provide family linkages for single, low-income and under-housed individuals.

### **Trans support**

While participants felt that there will be an increase in Trans individuals coming out (and at younger ages), they also noted that there still is a lag in social acceptance and Trans competency in many spaces. Particular issues for this population include access to health-care, access to crisis and mental health support, advocacy for policy issues, and equitable access to rights and services.

### **Aboriginal/Two-Spirit Connections**

One area noted frequently that needs more extensive and thoughtful consultations was QMUNITY's interactions, services and programming in partnership with Aboriginal LGBTQ communities. One participant wondered whether Two-Spirit people feel safer walking into an Aboriginal space or a queer space? Is the queer space inclusive for Aboriginal people, and is the Aboriginal space queer friendly? Suggestions included hiring Aboriginal individuals as part of the centre's staffing and implementing Aboriginal-oriented programs. Participants noted the strong need for partnering with Aboriginal LGBTQ rather than consulting.

### **Societal changes**

Participants recommended that QMUNITY dedicate to staying abreast of changing political spheres, structural changes to institutions and services, and rising costs of living that could affect LGBTQ communities. The centre will also have to capitalize on social media and technology, while acknowledging that there will be community members who feel less comfortable with these platforms. The

outcome of the breakout session on values also suggested that there is a need to incorporate sustainable features and practices in the building in response to societal concerns regarding environmental issues.

### **Organizational capacity**

Alongside recognition of the increasing populations accessing the centre, participants discussed the need to develop the centre's capacity to meet growing needs. Recommendations included developing sustainable funding sources and forms of revenue generation, encouraging volunteer uptake, and building strong partnerships with other organizations to help meet intersecting needs.

## **Learning and Taking Action**

### **BREAKOUT 4**

*Which are the most important issues facing LGBTQ communities today and in coming years that QMUNITY can address through education and training?*

*Who do you want QMUNITY to advocate for?*

*What do you want advocacy and education work to look like?*

*During the final breakout session, participants were asked to identify priorities for QMUNITY's advocacy and education work to help achieve equality and protect the rights of LGBTQ communities and individuals.*

### **Accessibility and Isolation**

The most prominent issues that emerged as education and advocacy priorities for

QMUNITY to address were isolation and barriers to accessibility. These issues were often brought up together with suggestions of a wide range of inclusive practices that could tackle both of them.

*“Growing up isolated and gay is difficult – the next generation needs to feel included and not to feel lonely.”*

### Community building

QMUNITY was seen as having a central role in addressing issues of isolation and loneliness by providing a space that brings people together and creates a sense of belonging. Mentorship and intergenerational programs were mentioned as strategies to help reduce isolation among both seniors and youth. There were also suggestions that QMUNITY provide programs and activities that are interest-based instead of identity-based, allowing people with diverse backgrounds and identities to connect.

### Outreach and partnership

Participants often mentioned the need to address the lack of LGBTQ services and programs beyond the West End, especially in rural and remote communities in BC. Some strategies for bringing QMUNITY to different locations included satellite centres, QMUNITY outreach workers, and “QMUNITY Nights” events.

There was a strong emphasis on collaborating with and supporting other LGBTQ or allied organizations in order to extend QMUNITY’s geographical reach without taxing its



resources. QMUNITY was envisioned as the facilitator of connections and cooperation between allied organizations by sharing ideas of what others are doing, organizing collaborative fundraising around shared goals, developing an organizational mentorship program for capacity building and creating an annual conference for knowledge exchange. Collaborations with health authorities and community organizations could also help bring LGBTQ programming and services to remote or rural locations that don’t have established LGBTQ organizations.

This collaborative approach could be implemented within local communities, inviting organizations who have experience addressing particular issues, or who have an established community base, to use QMUNITY’s community spaces—including community centre, satellite location or virtual spaces—for programming.

*“it doesn’t matter where you are;  
you still have someone you can  
talk to”*

### **Establishing virtual services and education**

One of the most frequently mentioned strategies for reaching out to individuals who would have physical or other difficulties accessing the community centre is to use technology that could provide virtual access to QMUNITY’s services, programs and information resources. Ideas included offering online counselling or peer support groups, creating a QMUNITY app, live-streaming programs and events, broadening online advocacy, offering webinars and creating a virtual café where customers could meet up virtually.

QMUNITY should facilitate the implementation of this strategy by considering technology needs in the new centre, such as a strong wireless connection and screens in meeting rooms, access to computers, tablets or other technological tools, and technical support for members and groups who use the space. Participants noted that this could be an area where QMUNITY could solicit a major donation from a communications oriented technology company.

### **Financial, physical, cultural accessibility**

Addressing multiple barriers to accessibility was identified as a priority step in creating a welcoming centre that reduces isolation. Suggestions included:

- ensuring physical accessibility in all spaces within the centre

- offering free programs
- hiring staff that reflect community diversity
- offering diverse and community-driven programs and services
- offering multilingual services
- providing ASL interpretation and deaf/hard-of-hearing competency training

### ***Cross-sector Queer Competency***

The second highest rated action priority was ensuring LGBTQ individuals can access social services and healthcare in the wider community in a safe and equitable way. This is seen as a primary step in addressing other key issues, such as healthcare or seniors’ issues. There is particular emphasis on the need for training around Trans competency, language use, and non-binary gender and sexuality spectrums.

### **Queer competency training or certification**

There was strong support for expanding the existing Queer Competency Training program in businesses, corporations, government, healthcare, seniors’ homes, schools, police, immigrant services, etc. This training should be offered to anyone within services and organizations that have contact with the public—for example, not just for doctors and nurses but also for receptionists and office assistants.

There was a suggestion to create a “Rainbow Certification” program whereby organizations that have received training would be accountable for implementing specific practices and policies to maintain a safe space for LGBTQ

people. This could create a standard in many sectors, and a registry would assist in identifying certified spaces and services.

### **Curriculum and resource development**

QMUNITY could also be involved in curriculum development for early LGBTQ education in public schools, or the offering of LGBTQ modules in professional training programs such as medical and law schools. QMUNITY might create online resources to further support organizations and institutions in their queer competency.

### ***Healthcare***

Healthcare was identified by many as an ongoing priority for LGBTQ communities. They saw QMUNITY playing a role in supporting health in a holistic sense, including physical, sexual, and mental health, as well as addressing broader determinants of health. Suggested strategies included:

- an on-site clinic or mobile/flex clinics with a team of health care professionals, or collaboration with, and referrals to, external health services
- counselling, including access to low-cost long-term counselling
- trauma support and trauma-informed approaches
- recreation classes or spaces (e.g., dance, yoga, etc.)
- advocacy around related issues including healthcare policy change, housing and economic security, etc.

- On short-term counselling, and the need for long-term options:

*“Currently, it’s like taking the lid off the can of worms, then shutting it down right away”*

### ***Housing and economic security***

Poverty and housing were identified as a growing issue in Vancouver that strongly affect members of LGBTQ communities. Participants suggested QMUNITY take a two-pronged approach to support the communities in this area: first, they suggest offering frontline support to individuals through immediate services at the QMUNITY centre and referrals to partnered LGBTQ-friendly organizations; and second, they saw QMUNITY working as an advocate and activist for larger systemic change, researching needs and best practices and paying special attention to LGBTQ needs.

### ***Human and civil rights***

Participants discussed QMUNITY’s role in providing awareness, education, and advocacy around human rights and civil rights issues, not only on behalf of LGBTQ communities in society, but also acting in solidarity and allyship with other social justice movements in acknowledgement of multiple intersecting identities.

Alongside workshops and queer competency training for the wider community, participants suggested offering legal education and allyship training for LGBTQ communities. They

proposed creating violence prevention programs such as a Neighbourhood Watch against emotional, physical, sexual and systemic abuse, as well as creating a culture of accountability within the centre so that it doesn't fall on the shoulders of the marginalized to defend themselves or educate others.

Participants also emphasized QMUNITY's role in building awareness and political will, building partnerships with stakeholders, and directly advocating for policy and systemic changes needed to address key issues.

*“e<sup>2</sup>  
equity and education”*

# ▶ SMALL GROUP CONSULTATION DIALOGUES

QMUNITY hosted eight small-group evening dialogues in partnership with the Centre for Dialogue, each two hours long, with 3-17 participants per dialogue. Participants at each dialogue represented specific LGBTQ groups or identities, particularly from non-dominant communities. Due to limited resources only eight subgroups could be accommodated, with the eight focal communities selected by the Building QMUNITY Advisory Committee. The small group dialogues focused on:

- Youth
- QTIPOC (Queer, Trans and Intersex People of Colour)
- Seniors
- Trans
- Families
- Dis/Ability
- Aboriginal/First Nations/Inuit/Métis/Two-Spirit
- Newcomers, Immigrants, Undocumented Immigrants Session

Attendance of the Families and Dis/Ability dialogues was not large enough to give confidence that the conversation reflected a diversity of views. Because of this low turnout, QMUNITY will seek further input from these groups through other channels.

Interested participants had an opportunity to sign up at the *Building QMUNITY* full-day dialogue, and community-wide invitations were issued after May 27 through QMUNITY's extensive contact list. Representative organizations aligned with the subgroups were encouraged to forward the invitations to their lists as well. Sessions were held between June and August 2015.

The format for the small group dialogues followed the template established for the *Building QMUNITY* consultation dialogue, but in a more concentrated form. Each workshop began by discussing the values the participants believed should be reflected in QMUNITY's work and physical space. This segment was followed by a discussion focused on the programs and services that QMUNITY should be offering to best serve that evening's small-group dialogue. The session concluded by asking participants to discuss the issues or challenges they saw facing their communities in the coming years and what QMUNITY should address as priorities in their education and advocacy work. Facilitators gave space for adjusting the agenda if the group felt that a particular discussion needed more time. Thus, programs and services and education/advocacy were collapsed into one segment in some sessions.

Each session was co-facilitated by a facilitator from the Centre for Dialogue partnered with a

facilitator who identified as part of that evening's group. A note taker captured the ideas for later analysis. The workshops were conducted by Chatham House Rule under which participants are free to use the information, but the identity of any participants can not be revealed.

## Youth

### VALUES

Accessibility was expressed as a key value for our youth participants. Physical and ASL accessibility were noted as critical aspects of a QMUNITY facility, and cultural aspects of accessibility were also highlighted. For example, a white male-dominated space, or one with primarily adult inhabitants, would not feel accessible to LGBTQ youth. Pronoun check-ins at meetings/events, or buttons/name tags with proper pronouns would also create accessibility. QMUNITY satellite locations and extensive online programming were other factors mentioned as promoting accessibility. Youth in particular, and especially those just coming out, would benefit greatly from an accessible queer culture in their immediate physical communities or at virtual sites.

Diversity was discussed as another important value that could be implemented through tangible policies and actions. For example, hiring diverse staff makes a statement about how welcome diversity is at QMUNITY. Having a Two-Spirit elder in the centre was another idea that would emphasize support for diverse backgrounds and lifestyles.

Another value of importance to the youth panel was family inclusion. Family and/or

parent drop-ins and a family-focused resource call number were suggested as ways to express a proactive QMUNITY stance around supporting parents, children and extended families of LGBTQ individuals.

Support was highlighted as a significant QMUNITY value for youth and can be expressed through programming such as organizing peer networks, having social workers on staff, hosting a queer-oriented medical clinic, and establishing referral services for housing, food, finances, mental health and addiction services.

Ownership of the community centre space was another youth value described as "*the kind of ownership that we get when we can invest in and build the space itself.*" Art contributed by community members, or murals painted on the walls by youth, were mentioned as possible ways to enhance that intangible feeling that it's a youth-friendly space. Employment at or associated with the community centre also would allow youth to take ownership in the new facility.

### *Programs and Services*

The youth participants in the workshop had a number of tangible suggestions for programming and services tailored to their demographic. Their ideas included:

- A media room with a diversity of equipment and programs. Computers, green screens, a recording studio and games were mentioned—the VPL Central Branch noted as a successful example. Youth-driven art and media projects could be an important

component of programming in a media room and connect with education and advocacy projects for queer issues and visibility in the wider community.

- A comfortable, welcoming space where anyone can congregate. The group also suggested having specific times encouraging defined groups to congregate. Family and Trans drop-ins were specifically noted, along with having online drop-in chat rooms.
- An onsite medical clinic, specifically staffed with a Trans-competent doctor, preferably specialized in endocrinology.
- Youth-specific support and referral services for housing, food, finances, mental health and addiction services, both in-person and online. These would be particularly important for newcomers or those without family support. Specific support groups were mentioned such as Trans and QTIPOC, where shared identity would be important. Also, support services for youth transitioning to the 26 and older demographic would be desirable, as well as a mentorship program and family support services for youth younger than 14.
- Clothing and food services, specifically a clothing swap and a partnership with a food bank. They also suggested a kitchen where youth could learn nutrition and cooking skills and they or volunteers could come in and cook hot meals.
- Opportunities to tutor and be tutored, especially in mathematics and English, for provincial and other exams as well as for ESL students.

- Programming specific to the different needs of age sub-groups, such as youth in their teen years and in their early twenties.

### *Education and Advocacy Work*

Education and advocacy for and about non-binary individuals were perceived as missing from within and outside of LGBTQ communities. Asexual, pansexual and bisexual individuals may feel silenced—developing their voices was seen as a priority in our small group dialogue.

Similarly, education around identity fluidity and body positivity is important and developing a narrative around legitimizing identities that are not static. Education about the diversity around different looks, beauty standards, ways of expression and identity should be promoted. A social media campaign would be ideal, perhaps with a volunteer or paid position through QMUNITY that could partner with the Vancouver Queer Film Festival to produce content.

Current sex education in schools was seen as too cis- and hetero-normative, and another priority for education and advocacy work was developing tools teaching that sex can be different things to different people. QMUNITY could be involved in curriculum development around a much broader concept of sexuality than is expressed in current BC curriculum.

The workshop also suggested developing more education around hormones and surgeries for Trans individuals. Information concerning benefits, risks and medical services would be particularly useful, as well as advocacy for improved hormonal/surgical access.

Partnerships with the Trans Health Information Program, the Catherine White Holman Centre and others in the community health sector would be advisable, as well as a focused educational effort for those involved in delivering health care.

Education and activism tailored towards specific ethno-cultural groups was perceived as helpful. Participants suggested that programs be developed in various languages, and with distinctive sensitivity toward particular cultures and religions, tailoring education and activism toward specific ethno-cultural groups. Police were mentioned as another group for which extensive LGBTQ training would be highly beneficial.

Finally, the workshop suggested increased support for safe schools in Canada programs to be done through events reaching out to community groups to create inclusivity. Programs that include queer youth sharing their experiences were seen as particularly impactful.

The session concluded with a discussion of what life for queer youth will look like in ten years, and what issues might still be present. The response was clear: people will still be "*going through hell and shit*," and having trauma-informed care and support for youth will remain a necessary and high priority. Youth will still need housing, support around basic needs, connections with organizations and communities, advocacy on an individual basis, and assistance in navigating systems.

## QTIPOC (Queer, Trans and Intersex People of Colour)

### VALUES

The most prominent value raised by participants was diversity in staff and programs. Some small-group participants saw QMUNITY as less welcoming towards QTIPOC individuals because people of colour are not perceived as populating the leadership, board, staff and volunteers. These participants were uneasy about how welcome they would feel in the community centre if this issue were to be left unaddressed.

They also pointed to many values brought up in the other components of the community consultation, particularly physical accessibility and pride of place/space. A clean, well cared-for centre translates into establishing dignity for those in the building and gives a sense of pride for the space as a hub and representation for LGBTQ communities. A place of pride and dignity was seen as particularly important for participants who identified as QTIPOC, a group that often experiences multiple discrimination.

Inclusion was another important value brought up during the evening. Participants made the point that inclusion does not always mean everyone is welcome everywhere, but that safe spaces and programs for specific groups are also a key component to an inclusive environment. They stressed that QMUNITY needs to support and stand by programs exclusively designed for QTIPOC. Respecting and embracing different cultures and ways of talking/being/expressing is another aspect of inclusion

valued by the participants, particularly representations of non-western cultures. Cultural sensitivity staff training was seen as essential.

Similar to other groups, ongoing engagement was important for participants of the QTIPOC small-group dialogue. They would like to see a culture of curiosity established that asks questions rather than makes assumptions. There was some discussion about the importance of discomfort, and facilitating a culture of allowing uncomfortable topics to be aired; supporting and acknowledging those whose views may not be seen as mainstream. Allowing all segments of QMUNITY to speak out without negative consequences, embracing inconvenient truths, adopting a whistleblower protection policy and a neutral ombudsperson were mentioned as ways to protect discomfort.

### *Programs and Services*

The participants made the general point that QTIPOC should be part of hiring panels for staff, reflecting diversity among QTIPOC groups. Also, it is important to follow through with action on QTIPOC concerns.

QTIPOC-specific programming was a high priority. QMUNITY should provide facilities for international students, refugees, immigrants and others from diverse backgrounds to initiate their own programs. Intergenerational and culture groups were mentioned, as were language social groups, events like potluck dinners, and shows. A QTIPOC-only drop-in space was another idea suggested by the participants.

Satellite programming with a QTIPOC focus was another common theme; coordinating roaming meeting locations outside of the West End and into areas of the Lower Mainland and further into BC. QMUNITY might reach out to other groups such as SUCCESS, MOSAIC and ISS to work with new immigrants and refugees and international student groups. An outreach coordinator would be desirable.

### *Education and Advocacy Work*

Accessibility of information about QTIPOC was perceived as important; having material both physically accessible and visible in the building as well as virtually available. Computer terminals in the centre and easily accessed databases from anywhere in BC were recommended. Culturally specific information in different languages is needed. Connecting QTIPOC individuals with other services and information also is a high priority.

Cultural competency was seen as an important direction for education and advocacy work. QMUNITY needs to begin internally by addressing staff diversity and actively introducing cultural competency into staffing and programs, and also reaching out beyond LGBTQ communities to better educate the general public on QTIPOC issues and cultures.

Information and action about sexual health, housing, poverty, food security and employment were seen as other important areas for QMUNITY education and advocacy work.

## Seniors

### VALUES

Seniors echoed the common themes of inclusivity and valuing diversity, recognizing that issues around these values are exacerbated for minorities within minorities, such as LGBTQ seniors. Participants suggested less emphasis on fitting in and sameness and more valuing people for being different, along with addressing stereotypes.

The participants perceived seniors as adding particular value to LGBTQ communities as a resource—connecting to history as well as resources for sharing lived experience. They suggest that it's important to clearly define who is a senior, and noted that seniors could adopt mentor and elder roles.

Accessibility is important. They pointed particularly to recognizing poverty as a barrier to inclusion and participation, emphasizing the inclusion of small and rural communities. Partnerships were seen as a key element to increase the reach of QMUNITY, noting particularly PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). Participants suggested QMUNITY look to corporate partners for sponsorship and funding.

Finally, arts and culture should be front and centre as an active value, as is supporting different arts, literature and ways of expression.

### *Programs and Services*

Using technology to connect communities was seen as a key programming/service element for QMUNITY, particularly in the aid

of increasing access for small towns. They saw youth mentoring seniors in the use of technology as an important intergenerational connector, while seniors could mentor youth in other areas. Virtual sharing of seniors' stories was seen as another strong use of technology, as is the archiving of seniors' memoirs in an LGBTQ history repository.

Programs and services around health issues are a critical need for seniors to support aging well and navigating the healthcare system. As one participant put it, "*We haven't been old before.*" QMUNITY could assist by helping people find LGBTQ friendly GP's, particularly in rural areas, connect seniors with nurse practitioners and other health care providers through a drop-in service, assist with resources around social work/health issues, and provide an LGBTQ resource guide. Bute Street Clinic should be maintained and expanded to ensure that health services are offered to seniors.

The idea of organizing seniors programs and services around aging in place was seen as an important concept to guide QMUNITY in providing support for seniors. One suggestion was to provide representatives to accompany and support seniors for appointments. Primetimers and the Dr. Peter Centre are beginning to organize related programming and might be good partners for QMUNITY in this endeavour. Housing was seen as a priority; finding funding to build independent living facilities for seniors as well as a rent bank were suggested.

Social events were another priority for seniors, not just for gays but inclusive of all LGBTQ communities. Participants expressed a

preference for events that bring diverse people together rather than isolate into more narrowly defined groups.

### *Education and Advocacy Work*

QMUNITY should advocate for seniors to reduce pressure related to housing, health and finances. For housing, advocating for affordability was seen as a high priority, while generic medication and cost reduction were seen as key for health-related priorities.

Legal advocacy was another priority; providing assistance on issues such as end of life questions, will workshops, representation agreements, financial planning, issues around Alzheimer's, and elder abuse. Services for couples are often neglected in LGBTQ advocacy work. Participants suggested this would be a useful expansion of QMUNITY's focus.

Support for telling seniors' stories through arts and culture was seen as an important education function that might find a home at QMUNITY. Liaison with government offices might be helpful in developing LGBTQ-specific handbooks and educational materials with a strong seniors component.

## **Trans**

### **VALUES**

Accessibility was seen as a key value in the Trans small group dialogue, particularly for suburban and rural communities. Programs and services become out of reach because of travel distances, and decentralization is key to serving Trans as well as other LGBTQ communities. QMUNITY might consider partnering

with other community centres as satellite locations, preferably close to transit. Mobile programs to take services out to other Lower Mainland and BC locations would be another option to decentralize. Providing resources in other languages would also increase accessibility, as would an expanded virtual presence.

Inclusivity is another important value for the Trans community. The participants pointed out that gender should never be assumed, and that identities such as asexual and non-binary often feel excluded. Registration forms should use inclusive language, and events ensure that gender-inclusive washrooms are available and well-signed. The community centre and satellite/virtual campuses were seen as spaces where inclusivity and acceptance thrive, creating environments where individuals feel safe and can communicate, interact and advocate from a place of visibility.

QMUNITY programming, services, education and advocacy might be developed and implemented through the lens of fostering wellness and well-being, an approach vital to marginalized communities and individuals who have often experienced trauma. Courage and heart were mentioned as connecting values, with QMUNITY being bold and proud of its values and mission, humble in learning and enabling communities to come together in difference. Celebration should not be neglected, bringing levity, playfulness and a light-hearted spirit as a balance to serious issues.

The small group dialogue participants also encouraged QMUNITY to support the work of other non-profits to spread the workload

and expand the concentration of responsibility across communities. A strong lobby is needed around LGBTQ issues, and a coalition of organizations will be more powerful than any single group.

### *Programs and Services*

A monthly clinic was seen as a high priority, where Trans individuals can come to one place and talk about a range of issues including health as well as gender and name changes for identification purposes. For wellness, a Trans-competent trainer was suggested.

Participants suggested a number of awareness-raising and communications strategies. To improve the level of knowledge and to enable better policies, QMUNITY could collect and publish statistical data on Trans individuals and communities gathered by government, universities and non-profit organizations. A story bank of community member stories, with assistance and training from media experts in how to comfortably articulate would be helpful. QMUNITY could host online spaces where people in the process of transitioning could access those who have already gone through that process. A pen-pal program could facilitate connection, especially for those in rural areas.

A mentoring system would be helpful, connecting a person who has come out and a person who is coming out, perhaps something like the Big Brother/Big Sister program, or matching recent immigrants with those established in Canada. A Trans job fair was suggested, as well as programming and services specific to age demographics facing different

realities, for example children, younger Trans folks who are dating and older adults who might be aging in care facilities. Social groups and movie nights were proposed as well.

QMUNITY might foster young Trans and gender creative children to meet, serving as a connector hub through both physical and virtual meeting spaces. Providing space for facilities that support families and allies is a priority, as well as groups for young adults (ages 19-30), partners of Trans folks and diverse discussion groups. Listing of medical resources, a Trans gear exchange (binders, packers, breast forms, bras, etc.) was proposed.

Finally, participants suggested spiritual programming as a useful addition to the QMUNITY repertoire.

### *Education and Advocacy Work*

Education and advocacy raising awareness and sensitivity around Trans issues was seen as critical, particularly in the healthcare sector. Trans competency needs to be embedded within institutions and organizational culture. Beyond “Trans 101,” education needs to become more action oriented, perhaps through development of a best practices toolkit highlighting implementable strategies. A focus on educators and pre-service teachers was another suggested concentration.

Housing advocacy was seen as important, not only long-term but also shelters and short-term housing.

## Aboriginal/Two-Spirit

### VALUES

The Aboriginal/Two-Spirit session was the best-attended small-dialogue session. 17 individuals gathered at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre to reflect in talking circles on Aboriginal insights and suggestions around the role of QMUNITY and the new community centre.

A cluster of values that stood out during the opening round centered around decolonization and inclusion. Participants would like to see the traditional and ancestral lands of Aboriginal and Two-Spirit people as well as their art, culture, history, language and traditions respected and present at QMUNITY. Their hope is that those who come to QMUNITY would see themselves and their culture reflected through visual representation (art, building style/materials), but also through the way QMUNITY operates, including having Aboriginal staff running programs for Aboriginal people, and seats on the board for Aboriginal and Two-Spirit representatives. One participant noted that Aboriginal/Two-Spirit people were usually not represented in QMUNITY's and other LGBTQ campaigns/promotions. Others recalled past tensions and conflict between QMUNITY and Aboriginal/Two-Spirit communities, especially around cultural traditions and practices, such as smudging and drumming, that were not permitted at QMUNITY.

Participants appreciated QMUNITY reaching out and providing a space for dialogue. They expressed hope that a new, more collaborative partnership can be built with QMUNITY that will involve Aboriginal and Two-Spirit people

on an ongoing basis, working together with Aboriginal architects, lawyers, board members, staff and volunteers, in shaping the future of QMUNITY and its facility. Protocol is crucial, meeting with elders and consulting on policies, but beyond consultation also including Aboriginal voices as part of decision-making for QMUNITY.

Engaging Aboriginal/Two-Spirit communities and their members in building and running a new facility was seen as a necessary step to create a space that is safe, welcoming, that feels like a home, allows people to be with others and reflect as they are making decisions about which services to access and which programs to participate in, but also where Aboriginal/Two-Spirit people can feel free to take up space and be assertive.

A point that seemed to resonate with most participants was the hope and expectation that through an ongoing conversation and partnership, QMUNITY would continuously check-in on the needs of Aboriginal/Two-Spirit people and adapt its programming rather than only working to meet the needs discussed today/ during this consultation process.

It was clear that participants felt that today's dialogue could be the beginning of a larger conversation. One participant expressed the *"hope that QMUNITY will come away from this saying 'this is bigger than we thought it was – we need more meetings.'"*

## *Programs and Services/Education and Advocacy*

During the second talking circle, participants were asked to identify what they saw as the two most important issues facing Aboriginal/Two-Spirit communities in the coming years and how QMUNITY could best help address these issues through its programming and services (including education and advocacy work). Outcomes included:

- Education: Many participants pointed out the lack of knowledge about Two-Spirit people, their history and culture, and the fact that being Two-Spirit is more than about sexual identity. Making space in QMUNITY's programming for Aboriginal/Two-Spirit history and teaching was seen as a high priority.
- Addressing lateral violence: An issue and programming priority that was brought up several times was lateral violence perpetrated against Aboriginal/Two-Spirit people by members of their own communities.
- Ceremony: Including Aboriginal/Two-Spirit ceremonies was seen as a priority because of its crucial role in supporting community and individual healing. One participant emphasized the importance of "*learning about the genocide within the genocide*," perpetrated against Aboriginal/Two-Spirit people in the process of colonization.
- Anti-racism work: As one participant pointed out, racism strongly affects lives today and impacts the ways we see/address issues. Racism has created an us-vs.-them narrative that makes it difficult to address these problems.
- Community: Participants would like QMUNITY to offer programming that allows for Aboriginal people to come together, including potlatches. Events should include great food and acknowledge/address poverty.
- Safety: Safety was an important issue that was raised several times. Participants expressed that QMUNITY is not seen as a safe space for Aboriginal youth. As one participant put it: "*to be heard, you have to be safe in the first place.*"
- Creativity and artistic and self-expression: One participant cited the words of an Elder: "*We are never fully healthy unless we are also creating.*"
- Aboriginal health: programs and services that also address spiritual and mental health, as well as addiction programs, were mentioned.

## **Newcomers, Immigrants, Undocumented Immigrants Session**

### **VALUES**

Participants in the Newcomers/Immigrants small group dialogue noted that they might not know what LGBTQ means and that they are meant to be included, as they may not be familiar with the terms or relatively open culture in Canada compared to their home countries. For them, inclusion translates into finding out basic information about relevant communities, but also being able to come to QMUNITY without having to fit into an LGBTQ box. Participants stressed that identities go beyond the existing categories and that newcomers

and refugees are sometimes unfamiliar with the categories created in LGBTQ communities in Canada. Thus, a key value is to provide programs and services based on a person's need across their identities and the groups they may be identified with.

Clarity was noted as another important value. They advised QMUNITY to be clear about services offered as well as limitations and actively refer clients when QMUNITY is not able to assist. Availability is also important, with visible, open reception, posters of services offered, and clear online pathways to find services. Currently, newcomers perceive that services are hidden and hard to find, an issue compounded by their lack of familiarity with Canadian administrative customs.

Connecting people was seen as another core value, as newcomers have not yet built up a network of contacts and relationships. They cautioned not to be focused on LGBTQ resources alone; one participant suggested they would prefer QMUNITY not suggest a gay lawyer but suggest the best lawyer. The community centre should be similar to a church as a place to connect safely, although without the worship aspect.

Newcomers/immigrants also want to be seen as themselves, heard fully and referred adequately. They suggested QMUNITY staff should find out who they are serving first, becoming knowledgeable about different demographic and related issues.

## *Programs and Services*

A high priority is to provide programs and services in several languages, as many refugees come with limited knowledge of English. Similarly, counselling services for newcomers need to engage professionals capable of understanding the challenges faced by refugees and newcomers.

Services for refugees are particularly needed to support queer refugees to transition into Canadian society and introduce them to non-LGBTQ society. Assistance in jobs, housing, organized social activities, picnics, workshops and knowledge sharing are all highly desirable. And all newcomers would benefit from introduction to basic Canadian standards, banking, paying bills, learning about credit cards, civil rights, how the political system functions, how to vote and public speaking. ESL courses are not necessary for QMUNITY to offer, as many other organizations already do this, but referrals to LGBTQ friendly providers would be welcome.

One-on-one confidential sessions with lawyers and other relevant service providers would be less uncomfortable for refugees than group sessions, and a confidential assessment to help connect with services would be helpful. A mentorship program for newcomers/immigrants/refugees was suggested, as well as providing access to Internet and technology. One participant noted that newcomers may not have access to or familiarity with the Internet, including common social media such as Facebook, and training in those areas would be helpful.

## *Education and Advocacy Work*

Participants suggested that QMUNITY host consultations with refugee-based organizations, and saw raising awareness about the needs of LGBTQ refugees as a particularly important area for education and advocacy. Issues including poverty, childcare, depression, drug abuse and family support all need airing and awareness-building.

Internally, QMUNITY can provide information to newcomers, answering simple and specific questions about Canadian culture, providing resources to aid in planning life in a new country. Sensitivity about cultural values is important, as newcomers are faced with the difficult challenge of maintaining the culture of their home countries while integrating into Canadian life.

# SURVEY

A survey was conducted online and through paper survey forms distributed through LGBTQ-serving organizations, the QMUNITY and other websites and community events. The survey was available from the date of the Building QMUNITY Consultation, 27 May 2015, until 4 September 2015. Response was strong, with about 629 surveys completed in total. There were 28 questions, although not all respondents answered all questions, and some questions allowed for multiple answers, so that the sample size for each question varied from 147 to 628, but generally was between 400–430 for the key questions.

The survey began by asking respondents for demographic information and self-descriptions including gender, sexuality, other identities, age, birth location, relationship status, income and employment status. All responses were voluntary, and filling out these questions was not a requirement to complete the remainder of the survey.

The second group of question topics asked respondents to rate issues important to LGBTQ communities, and to consider what programs and services would be most important to offer through a community centre.

A third group of questions covered relationship to, interactions with and impressions of QMUNITY, and their preferred mode and content of communications, asking how respondents would like to be informed of events and issues through QMUNITY. The survey also included a section on donations and fundraising.

Full survey results can be found at <http://qmunity.ca/building/>

## *Profile of Respondents*

The self-description categories revealed that an impressive array of gender and sexual identities participated, indicating that the survey covered a broad and inclusive representation of LGBTQ communities. Gay and Lesbian identities were strongly represented, 44% and 22% respectively, as well as Queer (31%), Bisexual (14%) and Trans (14%). Other categories at 7% or less included Questioning, Straight, Two-Spirit and parents/children/relatives of an LGBTQ person. 12% of respondents preferred a free text response to the categories provided, describing themselves as Pansexual, Demisexual and Fluid sexual, among many other identities.

Gender categories were also well represented, including Male (47%), Female (42%), Trans (10%), Genderqueer (10%) and Two-Spirit (3%). In this case, 7% of respondents chose a free-text answer to describe themselves, with responses including Genderfluid, Non-binary, Neurodiverse and others. Some identified as either Dis/abled, Person of Colour or Person of Faith in roughly equal proportions, about 14% of respondents in each of those three categories. Most respondents were born in Canada, 68%, while slightly over 30% were either immigrants or here on work/study permits. 4% of respondents identified as indigenous. Age categories were broadly represented, with about 19% under the age of 25, 17% over the

age of 65 and the remainder evenly distributed from 26 to 65 years of age.

Responses to the survey were higher from outside of Vancouver than for the Building QMUNITY Consultation, with 32% of survey respondents indicating they lived outside of Vancouver, compared to 17% for the all-day dialogue. 21% of all respondents outside Vancouver lived in the Lower Mainland, and the remainder included BC residents from Victoria, Salt Spring Island and the Sunshine Coast in the south, through the Okanagan and central/northern BC.

The respondents were fairly well educated, with only 7% indicating they had not completed high school and 27% reporting graduate degrees. Close to half (43%) identified as single, with about 37% either married, common law or in committed relationships. Most of the remaining respondents identified with various categories including polyamorous, open, widowed and others. Income levels were spread out from less than \$25,000 annually to greater than \$150,000, and about half the respondents were employed full-time. The remaining were either employed part-time (13%), or unemployed, retired or students.

Taking these characteristics together, the survey succeeded in sampling the hoped-for broad range of LGBTQ communities.

### *Key Programming and Service Results*

Respondents were asked to think about an LGBTQ resource centre, and asked what they considered to be the three most important

services it should offer. Youth services were by far the most important category, noted by 51% of respondents. A number of services followed youth with about 25% support for each, including HIV and STI testing and counselling, mental health services, services for LGBTQ seniors, information and referrals for LGBTQ communities, services for Trans communities and LGBTQ issue advocacy. Cited less often but still on the list of important services were public education, services for families, and space/support for art, cultural events, sports and recreational events.

Another question focused on rating issues most important to LGBTQ communities in BC, asking respondents to rate a wide variety of issues from “Very Unimportant” to “Important.” Issues rated as “very important” by at least 50% of respondents include Youth Vulnerability, Transphobia/Discrimination, Violence Against LGBTQ people, Mental Health Issues, Sexual Health, Accessing Appropriate Medical Care and Seniors Vulnerability. The remaining categories were rated as “very important” by less than 50%, but more than 30% of respondents, including HIV/AIDS, Loneliness, Poverty, Housing Discrimination, Employment, Limited Acceptance of LGBTQ People, Substance Use/Abuse, Refugee/Newcomer Settlement, Limited Visibility/Awareness of LGBTQ Issues, Limited Acceptance of LGBTQ people, Intimate Partner Violence and Criminal Justice Involvement.

Concentration of programming in the West End was raised as an issue, with some respondents indicating interest in a wider geographic reach for QMUNITY. One

commented: “*Right now QMUNITY is more Vancouver-focused —there needs to be a very strong effort to get resources or satellite resources available outside of Vancouver, particularly in the Fraser Valley.*”

Another question asked respondents to rate whether QMUNITY already provides a service, or should or should not provide it. QMUNITY was rated highly as already providing quite a range of services, with the strongest responses for HIV/STI testing, sexual health education, arts and culture events, counselling, LGBTQ training and education, social connections, LGBTQ relationship support, support for allies, peer support groups, youth leadership and drop-in programs, volunteer opportunities, Trans support services, information and referral and social events for seniors.

Respondents also noted a number of services that “QMUNITY does not currently provide but should.” These included sports and recreational activities, legal services, a young professional group and queer parenting program. One potential service was rated strongly as a service that QMUNITY should not provide, a naturopathic clinic.

A final question indicates a key challenge for QMUNITY in choosing which services to offer directly and which to leave to other organizations as primary service providers. The question asked respondents to indicate which LGBTQ organizations and activities they participate in outside of QMUNITY. The array of groups respondents reported that provide programming, advocacy, support and other services was impressive; examples include

the Rainbow Dodgeball League, CUPE BC Pink Triangle Working Group, Rainbow/Queer Families camping and ski trips, Safer Schools Coalition, Kootenay Transgender, Okanagan Pride Society, Femme Choir, Frontrunners and Mabel League, among many, many others.

### ***Relationships/Interactions with QMUNITY***

A little over half of the respondents had some previous relationship with QMUNITY, either as a member, donor, volunteer or client. 75% had participated in programs or services provided through QMUNITY, similar to the number of respondents who thought QMUNITY was well known within the LGBTQ community. The predominant reasons provided by the 25% of respondents who had not participated in QMUNITY included not being aware of QMUNITY, events/programs were too far away from where they lived and the services were not relevant to their needs. A few respondents noted that the lack of accessibility for individuals with dis/abilities in the current QMUNITY offices was a barrier to participation. Interestingly, only 2% of respondents thought QMUNITY was well known to everyone in BC, suggesting additional outreach and visibility to the non-LGBTQ community might be a future priority.

One free text survey question asked respondents to share one activity they believe QMUNITY excels at, without specifying any options for responses. The highest number of respondents noted STI testing and sexual health clinic as their area of QMUNITY excellence. Three other areas of excellence were

also highlighted in the answers: 1) Creating an inclusive environment where connections can be made, 2) Advocacy and education efforts and 3) Youth programs and services. Few responses noted seniors programming, a prominent aspect of the in-person events. In addition, the excellence of QMUNITY in advocacy/education reported through this question was not consistent with the low number of respondents who thought QMUNITY was well known throughout British Columbia.

### *Conclusions from the Survey*

The Building QMUNITY survey had a robust response, eliciting comments from a wide range of LGBTQ individuals representing the broad spectrum of communities that QMUNITY serves. There was both breadth and depth, with representation across gender, sexual identity and many other factors. Significantly, the survey attracted responses from outside of Vancouver, not only across the Lower Mainland but also across British Columbia.

The responses were skewed towards those who had participated in some way in QMUNITY, so perhaps the sampling under-represented those less active in organized community programming. For those who have not been QMUNITY-involved, the reasons for their lack of participation were interesting; the most cited reasons were not being aware of QMUNITY, the programs were too far away or the services were not relevant. Some suggested a province-wide awareness campaign would be useful as part of developing the new community centre, especially expanding the centre's potential

relevance beyond its immediate West End location.

Concern about how location influences programming emerged throughout the survey, as was also apparent in other aspects of the Building QMUNITY consultation. The concern did not seem focused on QMUNITY's or the proposed community centre's physical location, but more that access to programming and services not be limited by geography. A strong virtual presence, program and service delivery outside of the West End and a BC-wide information campaign would be outcomes that would satisfy these concerns.

QMUNITY was identified as having many areas of excellence, most notably STI testing/sexual health programs, advocacy and education and youth programs and services. Another strength noted by survey respondents as a QMUNITY forte was creating inclusive environments, a key point as inclusivity was the primary value voiced in the all-day workshop and focal group meetings.

Participation through financial donations by respondents to QMUNITY was high, 33%, but also indicates room for growth, which will be particularly important as operational needs for the new community centre come on stream. Lack of awareness about QMUNITY by potential donors is the factor most amenable to action, and most respondents believed that QMUNITY is not well known outside the LGBTQ envelope.

Youth services were considered the single most important aspect of QMUNITY's

programming, followed by a cluster of STI testing and education, information and referral services, advocacy and support for Trans communities. This survey outcome did not conflict with the other Building QMUNITY consultations, but the importance of art and culture, recreation and direct support for families were more prominent in the all-day dialogue and small group dialogues. The survey respondents did suggest that QMUNITY should provide sports and recreation programming, but the considerable number and range of organizations listed by respondents that already provide sports and recreation activities indicate this area is reasonably well covered by other groups.

Finally, survey respondents often used language supporting QMUNITY as a hub for services rather than having a dominant primary delivery role, consistent with the other consultations. One survey respondent clearly articulated this vision: *"QMUNITY should be a 'a' strong voice and 'a' part of LGBT education, and 'a' part of advocacy in BC, and 'a' place the government should go. I have concerns about QMUNITY positioning as 'THE' go-to place for all of this. These are all systems change issues, and no one organization or voice can effectively impact the system. A plurality of voices and perspectives is vital in this, for credibility within queer and trans communities"*

# ▶ CONCLUSIONS

Taken together, the Building QMUNITY consultations revealed considerable enthusiasm for the new community centre, and provided a wide range of feedback and guidance that will be useful as QMUNITY proceeds with planning the facility and its programs and services. The new community centre will provide an opportunity to organize and expand the programming and services available to British Columbia LGBTQ communities; a keen desire was notable among participants of the Building QMUNITY consultation, both in person and through the online survey, to continue to be actively involved in this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

An exciting vision emerged for the new facility as a vibrant community hub that is *welcoming, safe, and a source of pride*. The breadth of programming and services imagined by participants was visionary and ambitious. Those consulted in person and through the survey expressed optimism that QMUNITY and the community centre will:

- celebrate the diversity of LGBTQ history, art and cultures;
- provide extensive and effective advocacy and education around LGBTQ issues;
- recognize trauma and provide appropriate medical, counselling and other support services;
- function as a positive gathering place for communities to forge personal and social connections; and

- connect community members with resources to meet a broad range of needs, including food, housing, legal and employability needs.

There generally was notable endorsement about QMUNITY's role in directing the community centre project, but with some crucial caveats: The centre must be inclusive of the full spectrum of LGBTQ communities, and all constituents need to be confident that they are welcome as full participants and staff in centre activities. Programming, staffing and leadership must be as diverse as the communities that compose the LGBTQ rainbow if the value of inclusion is to be realized.

An element of tension emerged around the topic of inclusivity: while most participants/respondents saw themselves as connected to the plurality of LGBTQ communities under QMUNITY's umbrella, they also expressed strong identities as part of subgroup communities that reflected combinations of gender, sexuality, age, cultural identity and other demographic, economic and social characteristics. Each group wants programming at which all are welcome, but many groups also would like to see programming and services designed for members of the subgroups with which they identify.

But the Building QMUNITY consultations also indicated interest in programming and services that connect different communities and identities, to build a broad sense of ownership

and pride of place as well as working with each other as partners and resources. Inter-generational mentoring came up often as an example, with the young helping elders deal with technology and elders providing historical perspective and advising younger community members on life issues. It will be a challenge to find the right balance of space and programs where those of similar orientations and identities can gather together through drop-in time/space, programming, advocacy and learning, while also meeting the broadly expressed desire to feel part of the larger LGBTQ umbrella.

Partnerships are key, and QMUNITY was seen as best serving the LGBTQ communities as facilitator and coordinator rather than trying to do everything itself. QMUNITY can best position itself as the hub of programming and services. Participants/respondents advised that creating strong partnerships with the voluminous organizations that serve LGBTQ individuals would be the most effective strategy for QMUNITY.

Further consultations with constituent organizations would be useful to define how the centre will partner with other organizations. The establishment of our consultation's Advisory Committee, a group that counselled the Building QMUNITY consultation effectively and sensitively, was an important guiding element for this project, and could continue to be useful in advising on the next stages of the QMUNITY centre's development.

The Building QMUNITY consultation was designed to focus on programs and services

that might animate the new centre rather than its physical details, but a number of suggestions for the building emerged nevertheless. There was a strong sense that the building should be environmentally and financially sustainable and include social enterprise components, particularly a café/coffee shop that could serve as a gathering place while providing employment for community members.

The design of the building as well as art and décor should reflect the diversity of LGBTQ values, identities and cultures. There was considerable support for Aboriginal/Two-Spirit themes in the building design and name, developed in partnership with local First Nations that would include local cultures, traditions and appropriate ceremonies.

A critical point raised throughout the consultation process was that, while a West End location for the building itself has been decided, extending QMUNITY's reach and accessibility of services beyond the gaybourhood is critical. QMUNITY and the community centre were seen as a British Columbia and not a Vancouver resource, and the building as a centre from which province-wide programming would emanate. Suggestions to accomplish that objective included investing resources in establishing QMUNITY's virtual presence, through providing online information but also by creating interactive programming and services to serve those who won't have proximity to the building. Planning the building with full interactive technology capabilities so that outlying communities could participate emerged as a vital component in the centre's design.

Satellite campuses, travelling programs and partnerships reaching throughout BC were other suggestions for how to extend the QMUNITY's reach beyond the West End centre. Participants/respondents imagined partnerships with already existing local organizations and facilities throughout BC, some with small but permanent programming/service centres and others through programming and services that could travel throughout the province, in partnership with local LGBTQ groups.

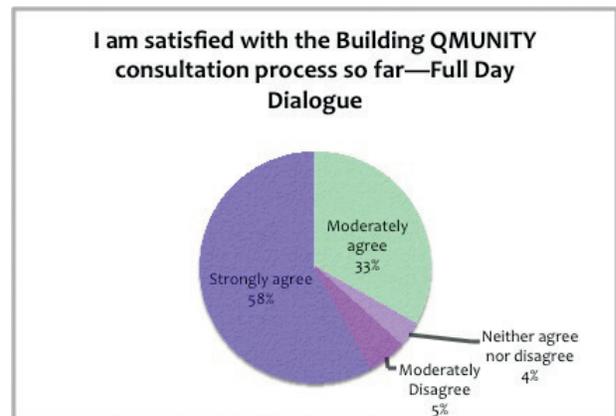
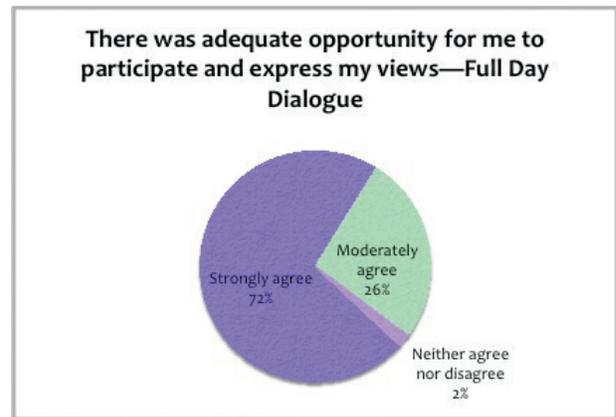
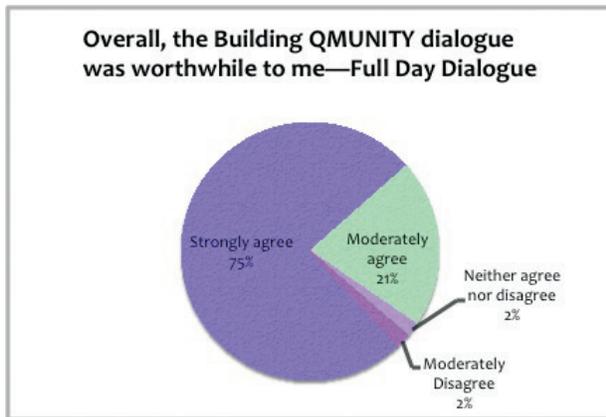
Finally, outreach and visibility to the non-LGBTQ community was seen as a priority, as well as building awareness of QMUNITY within and outside the LGBTQ world. The building will provide heightened expectations around QMUNITY's breadth and effectiveness, and the enhanced visibility that will emerge from the community centre is a unique opportunity to augment QMUNITY's effectiveness as an advocate for LGBTQ issues.

The Building QMUNITY consultations revealed a set of LGBTQ communities that are already providing an amazing array of services and programs, with QMUNITY emerging as a strong and effective umbrella organization. The community centre will provide an unprecedented opportunity to serve these many communities while establishing a strong sense of a broad LGBTQ community united by inclusion rather than divided by individual identities.

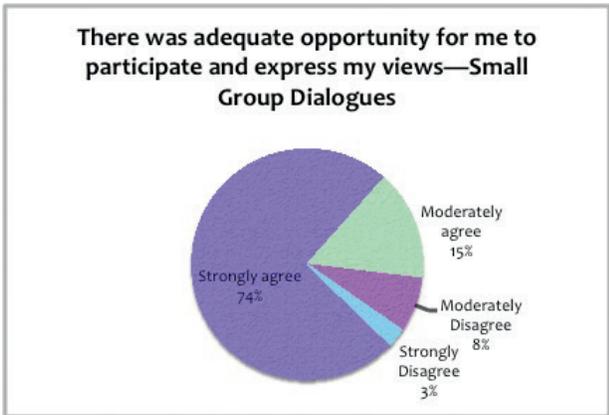
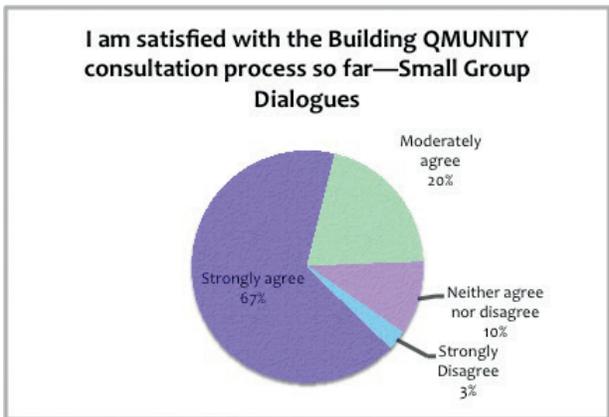
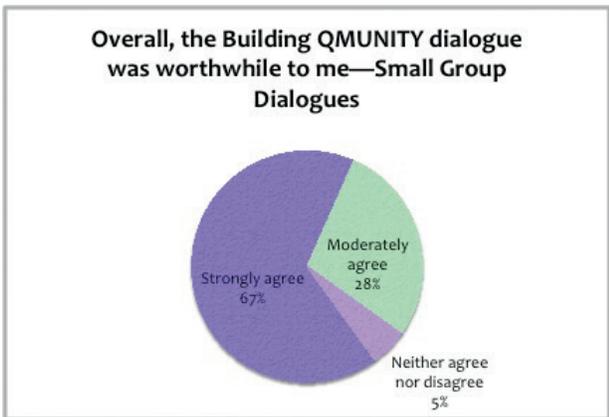
The road map towards this future is clear: inclusion, partnerships, ongoing engagement and outreach to create a BC LGBTQ community centre at which all are welcome.

# ▶ APPENDIX

## Evaluations: Building QMUNITY Consultation Dialogue



# Evaluations: Building QMUNITY Small group Dialogues



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