



Partnering on Inclusion: Creating Safer Space for LGBTQ and Immigrants

Presented by:

Octavio Lara - Calgary Catholic Immigration Society

Roseline Carter - Calgary Sexual Health Centre

Activity - What did you do this weekend?

- Write down 3 things that are the most important to you, these could include values, possessions, people, pets, hobbies, etc. Do not let anyone see your list.



Our Community
Our Future

Settlement Agencies and LGBTQ+ Immigrants



CCIS

CCIS is an Immigrant Serving Agency that provides Resettlement and Integration services to all immigrants and Refugees in Calgary and Southern Alberta

250+ Staff

62 Languages

70 Programs

14 Locations (Calgary and Southern Alberta)

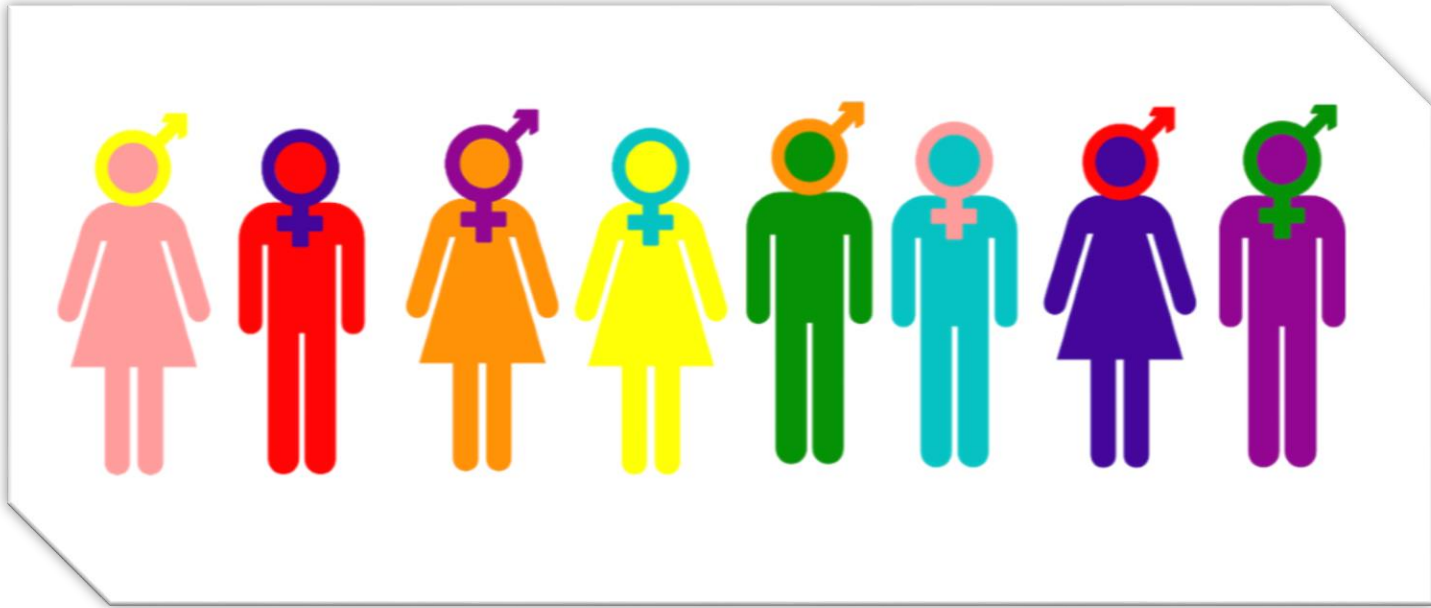
Gender Diversity Family Enhancement Program

Aims that children and youth of immigrant parents have the opportunity to develop healthy sexual and gender identities through supportive relationships from parents, peers and inclusive community spaces

- i) To provide education and support to immigrant parents and families in order to develop healthy relationships with their children
- ii) To educate staff in how to promote inclusive practices with LGBTQ individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds

**What immigrant settlement agencies
can do to increase their capacity to
serve LGBTQ+ immigrants?**

Common Language



LGBTQ+ terminology

It is based on a “Western” understanding of sexual or gender identity which cannot simply be applied in other settings.

Cultural Terminology

- Homosexual
- Maricon
- Cochon
- Bacha Bazi
- Bakla
- No word for same-sex attraction

Language

There is no word for lesbian or transgender in some languages - in other languages there is only a word for Transgender. -Hijra in South Asia-



Gender and Sexual Diversity

- It is against nature or a sin
- Western ideology
- It is a choice/lifestyle
- Something happens/or happened in childhood
- Intersex



Sexuality

- It is a private topic
- Taboo
- Parents do not talk about it with children
- No sex education
- Puberty and menstruation

INTERSECTIONS OF IDENTITY



CULTURE

(race,
ethnicity,
language,
values,
etc.)



FAITH



GENDER



SOCIAL STATUS



BI-CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

(due to
immigration)

Family Rejection

Higher rates of family rejection during adolescence were significantly associated with poorer **health outcomes** for LGBTQ+ young adults

- 8.4X more likely to report having attempted suicide
- 5.9X more likely to report high levels of depression
- 3.4X more likely to use illegal drugs
- 3.4X more likely to report having engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse

Lifetime Suicide Attempts for Highly Rejected LGBTQ Young People
(One or more times)



Families



Family Reactions

- Shock and Disbelief
- Prefer ignorance
- Fear, Sadness, Anger, Revulsion, Shame, Dismay
- Seeking blame – TV, Canada, Friends, Family
- Sense of Loss
- Pain
- Worry about family/community/cultural perception

Mostly, these reactions are born from a lack of knowledge and experience in this area.

Immigrant Parents' Quotes

"I escaped from oppression in my home country, and I feel oppressed here by the government because they are forcing me to accept my kid's sexual orientation."

"Canada promotes this to our children at school and media."

"[Mother] I do not want my community to know that my daughter is lesbian."

- *“It is difficult but I have to accept it because I don’t want to deal with government.” **[Dad]***
- *“**[Mother]** I am more open to this idea but for his father is more difficult to accept his trans-kid, he is trying very hard to educate himself, learn and accept our child.”*
- ***[Dad]** “I tried to change and prayed to God to be straight but I can’t. I am gay, I just hope my kids could understand me.”*

Parent Support

Parents hearing that their child is LGBTQ+ can last for hours, days, weeks, months or even years

- Provide resources, information and referrals
- Explain the Canadian Law around LGBTQ+
- Children and youth rights

How would you show support ?

How to Support Clients

- Clarify your values/beliefs and be aware of their impact
- Do not make assumptions about people's sexual orientation or gender identity
- Create and maintain safe spaces
- Be professional and respectful
- Be inclusive and non-judgmental
- Keep in mind that LGBTQ+ terms do not apply to all places or cultures

Celebrate Diversity



Who is Calgary Sexual Health Centre?

HEALTHY BODIES



HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS



HEALTHY COMMUNITIES



Calgary Sexual Health Centre focuses on three areas: **Healthy Bodies, Healthy Relationships and Healthy Communities.**

Healthy Bodies

When we understand our bodies, we take care of them, feel good about them, and make good decisions about our sexual health.

- Women who have experienced sexual trauma reclaim healthy sexuality for themselves.
- Youth in junior and senior high schools learn about their bodies' growth and development and how to prevent unplanned pregnancies and STIs.
- Older adults rediscover their sexual side and learn how to stay safe and healthy.

Healthy Relationships

Our emphasis on healthy relationships means that our programs have an impact on the issues of bullying, homophobia, and violence prevention, just to name a few.

- Junior high boys challenge masculine roles in the WiseGuyz program.
- Parents learn how to talk to their kids about sexuality and healthy relationships.

Healthy Communities

We work with various communities and train nurses, doctors, social workers and other professionals to talk about healthy sexuality with the people they work with.

- Professionals learn the skills they need to talk to clients with sexual health questions.
- Immigrant parents get support to talk to their children about sexuality and their values.
- LGBT youth connect through the GSA (Gay Straight Alliance)

CSHC's work to date:

- Partnerships with:
 - Calgary Catholic Immigrant Society
 - Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
 - Calgary Bridge Foundation for Youth
 - Alberta Association of Immigrant Services
- Partnership Intentions:
 - Build service providers comfort and skill regarding sexuality, sexual health and sexual orientation
 - Increase sector capacity to address gaps for LGBTQ immigrants and newcomers
 - Understand what we as a non-immigrant serving organization can do to better support LGBTQ immigrants and newcomers.

The experiences of LGBTQ Immigrants and Refugees

Experiences of discrimination from families, mainstream service providers and ISO's

Trauma stemming from anti-gay oppression in their home countries.

Exclusion from own community due to stigma.

Distancing from Canadian health care providers for fear of re-experiencing harassment from service providers.



CCIS & CSHC Partnership:

- Formally started in 2013
- Mutual staff capacity building
 - Creating a Culture of Respect for Gender and Sexual Diversity
 - Cultural Competency and Cultural Thinking Framework
- Family Enhancement Program- Shared Staff
- Host and support the LGBTQ Newcomers Group

What have we learned?

- **Program Implications:**

- Curriculums and language matter
- Partnerships/Referral Screen to better discern what services are available and accessible to LGBTQ newcomers

- **Organization Implications:**

- Ongoing staff training needs
- Practices of cultural humility
 - including knowing our role and our limits

CCIS & CSHC Partnership-

Lessons we are learning:

- Shared values and commitment from both organizations
 - Desire and commitment of time and money to learn about what it takes to create safer environments for LGBTQ immigrants and newcomers.
- Flexibility and adaptability
 - Willingness of both partners to adjust plan and solutions based on what we are learning
 - Equal buy in to engaging in evaluation process
 - Comfort with not knowing and testing new solutions, some which might fail.
- Openness and Trust
 - Vulnerability of both partners is required.
 - Setting rules of engagement in the relationships, it's ok to say when you don't know and it's ok to say when things are going as you anticipated.

Partnership: Strengths & Challenges

- Working in an emergent space is inherently challenging and identified strengths and challenges have been recorded through the developmental evaluation process in order to inform next steps and future endeavours.

Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The project is operating in a unique space, filling an important gap in Calgary's service landscape▪ Both project partners have approached the GDFE Program with enthusiasm, and senior leadership is supportive of the initiative▪ The Diversity Liaison has lived experience adding to his ability to understand service needs and gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The emergent nature of the work made it challenging to have clear program goals and understand ongoing project progress▪ Internal non-inclusive organizational culture and personal staff perspectives can be difficult to identify and more difficult to change once identified▪ Staff turnover in partner organizations and amongst the program evaluators created continuity challenges for the project▪ With CCIS' having 'Catholic' in its name, there are possible associated perceptions about lack of LGBTQ acceptance

Takeaways & Questions



Contact Us:

Octavio Lara, Diversity Liaison
Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
olara@ccisab.ca

Roseline Carter, Director of Programs
Calgary Sexual Health Centre
rcarter@calgarysexualhealth.ca