

Towards a Home for the LGBT Community in Nova Scotia The Rainbow Community Centre Project



**“Somewhere over the rainbow, skies are blue,
And the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true.”**

- Dorothy, *The Wizard of Oz*

(Lyrics: E. Y. “Yip” Harburg. Music: Harold Arlen)

March 2010

Sponsored by the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project with support from
Halifax Regional Municipality

Towards a Home for the LGBT Community in Nova Scotia
The Rainbow Community Centre Project

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A. Executive Summary

2.0 Project Plan

The Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project (NSRAP) surveyed the attitudes, interest, and ideas within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender (LGBT) Community (alternatively known as the Rainbow Community)¹ concerning the establishment of a community centre in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). In what follows, NSRAP will review its process and provide recommendations towards the creation of such a facility, based on the results of the survey and key interviews.

After receiving an HRM Community Grant, NSRAP initiated the first phase of the project and partnered with other LGBT community organizations (BLT Womyn of Halifax, Halifax Pride, prideHealth, and Wayves Magazine) to host a town hall meeting. Among other issues, a community centre was a major theme for discussion. In July 2009, 230 people were surveyed at Halifax Pride's Rainbow Community Fair. Throughout the fall and winter, NSRAP conducted interviews with established LGBT community centres across Canada.

3.0 LGBT Community Town Hall

Approximately 65 people attended the Town Hall to discuss issues of interest to the partner organizations and the community at large, including health care delivery, improving Wayves Magazine, etc. The topic of a community centre inspired considerable discussion and interest; much of that discussion informed the survey developed by NSRAP.

4.0 Community Survey

The survey was limited in scope to people who attended the 2009 Halifax Pride Rainbow Community Fair; 230 people completed the questionnaire. There was an almost even divide between female and male respondents (female=99, male=103; 28 did not subscribe to any one gender). While the majority of respondents identified their sexual orientation as either gay or lesbian, there was a fair representation of all sexual orientations and gender identities, including heterosexual.

The survey did not seek to extract demographic information on income, employment, or education; however some information regarding these issues can be inferred. Forty-seven respondents (20%) lived outside of HRM; Fifty-nine (25%) had previously visited an LGBT community centre, ranging from Halifax's own Youth Project to others as far afield as Toronto, Vancouver, Atlanta and San Francisco. Twenty-one percent of respondents expressed a need for culturally sensitive LGBT shelter and food bank services (36% among those identifying as Transgender), indicating a high degree of economic vulnerability.

¹ The designations LGBT Community and Rainbow Community are used interchangeably throughout this report. For a more detailed explanation of these names, their history and significance please see Appendix I: Glossary of Terms.

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4.2 - 4.3 Survey Results

- **95% (218/230) want to see an LGBT Community Centre established in HRM.**
- LGBT Community members indicated a strong preference for their community centre to be a large, stand alone building, with extended hours, located in downtown Halifax.
- The majority of participants felt that the most important aspect of a future centre would be to provide a venue for community social events. Other priorities include space for community meetings, a library/archive, and counselling/health services.
- The Youth Project was the LGBT organization most often named as a community group to be consulted during the process of creating a centre in Halifax. It was also, after Toronto's The 519 Community Centre, most often cited as a community centre respondents had visited.
- While most respondents answered that they had no concerns about the idea of a community centre, many were able to identify problems that might arise in starting or maintaining one. Funding was the issue most often raised, but others anticipated problems with staffing and volunteers, vandalism and homophobia, and concerns about lack of community and government support.
- When asked to name the most significant issue facing the LGBT Community in Nova Scotia today, most respondents identified homophobia, bigotry or intolerance.

4. 4 Conclusions

The LGBT Community feels strongly that it requires a physical, non-commercial space to provide both a social outlet and community services. However, the community is far from naive about the difficulties to be faced in creating such a facility. Also, despite the many advances the LGBT Community has made in recent decades, the spectre of homophobia and the desire for acceptance still loom large. In addition to tackling homophobia, survey respondents identified that enhancing a "sense of community" is a high priority for LGBT Nova Scotians. The creation of an LGBT Community Centre would play a significant role in addressing these issues.

5.0 - 5.6 West to East LGBT Community Centres across Canada

Beginning in the late fall of 2009 and continuing through winter 2010, NSRAP conducted interviews with *Qmunity: B. C.'s Queer Resource Centre* in Vancouver, B.C., *Pride Centre of Edmonton*, Edmonton, Alta., *Avenue Community Centre* in Saskatoon, Sask., the *Rainbow Resource Centre*, Winnipeg, Man., *The Well: LGBTQ Community Wellness Centre*, Hamilton, and *The 519 Church Street Community Centre* in Toronto, Ont. These interviews provided examples of different funding models and offered insights into potential programs for a community centre in Nova Scotia.

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6.0 Recommendations.

- **NSRAP should immediately** establish an independent Community Centre committee to move the project forward. Working initially under the umbrella of NSRAP, this committee should begin investigating different governance models and drafting a mission statement, policies and bylaws;
- **Set** about the establishment of a charitable foundation as a fundraising arm of a future community centre;
- **Initiate** discussion with all LGBT and allied service organizations, including those outside of HRM, to ensure full cooperation throughout the establishment of an LGBT Centre, full collaboration thereafter, and to avoid duplication of services;
- **Initiate** discussion with all three levels of government to seek the establishment of a permanent LGBT Community Centre in downtown Halifax;
- **Seek** collaboration with community partners, pending the establishment of a community centre, to establish much needed services and social groups, i.e. LGBT Elders, Health Services (including Transgender Services), LGBT Arts, Culture and Heritage, and
- **Identify** health and social sector practitioners who might provide counselling or other services at a future LGBT Community Centre.

The complete set of recommendations can be found on page 35 of this report.

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B. Acknowledgements

This project has gone through several phases. Throughout, the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project has benefited from the generous commitment of time, energy and expertise from numerous individuals and community organizations. In addition to all those named below, we also wish to extend our deepest thanks to our wonderful volunteers who administered the survey on Pride Day 2009.

Community and Corporate Partners:

Halifax Regional Council and Staff
AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia
Bisexual Lesbian Transgender Womyn of Halifax (BLT Womyn)
The Company House
Halifax Pride Committee
Halifax Sexual Health Centre
Menz Bar
prideHealth, Capital District Health Authority
Safe Harbour Metropolitan Community Church
Trans Family Association
Venus Envy
The Youth Project
Wayves Magazine

The Town Hall Planning Committee

Sue Andrews, Kimberley Fowlow, Kevin Kindred,
Dan MacKay, Jacqueline Throop-Robinson, and Jeanne Rokosh

The Staff and Volunteers at Canada's LGBT Community Centres, including:

Jennifer Breakspear, Executive Director, Qmunity: B.C.'s Queer Resource
Will Sutherland, Director, Pride Centre of Edmonton
Julie Richards, Co-Director, Avenue Community Centre for Sexual and Gender Diversity
Chad Smith, Executive Director, Rainbow Resource Centre
D. Dixon, Co-Chair, The Well: LGBT Community Wellness Centre of Hamilton
Helen Rykens, Office Manager, The 519 Church Street Community Centre

The authors also wish to thank the following individuals for their invaluable advice; technical support, literary input and personal support. This report would not have been possible without their help:

Eric Benson; Wade Carroll; Christopher Dean; Bob Fougere; Charles Hsuen; Benjie Nycum; Bryden MacDonald; William MacDuff Gillis; Randall Perry; Leonard Preyra; Garry Williams; and, Conor Woods.

Finally, we wish to thank the Board of Directors of the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project (NSRAP), past and present, for their encouragement and support. We particularly thank the current Board (2009/2010), for the opportunity to be a part of this project:

Matthew Numer, Chair; Lisa Buchanan, Vice Chair; Sean Foreman; Treasurer; Kevin Kindred, Past Chair; Catherine Meade, Member-at-Large; Robert Allan; Scott Comber; Elaine Craig; David Fudge; Tina Hunt; Nathaniel Smith; and, Lucas Thorne-Humphrey.

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1.0 Introduction

Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) is the major urban centre of Atlantic Canada; a provincial and regional capital city. It is home to the largest Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community in the Atlantic region and hosts many important LGBT initiatives, including one of the largest Pride celebrations in Canada. There can be no question of the advances made by LGBT citizens: in human rights; the arts; in business; and the humanities, for the benefit of all Nova Scotians. Despite these accomplishments, there remains a gap in available services for this community. Halifax does not currently have a community centre to serve its LGBT population and, as yet, no official plans have been made to change this situation. Nova Scotia boasts a rich and diverse cultural heritage; many of its communities have been able to develop and access this legacy through community centres. The LGBT People, comprised of all races, cultures and creeds, are an historically marginalized population. Establishing an LGBT Community Centre will be a major step toward remedying this injustice and allowing LGBT Nova Scotians to achieve their full potential.

For many years the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project (NSRAP) has envisioned a community centre located in HRM and serving the needs of the LGBT community. In March of 2007 NSRAP applied for and received funding from HRM for a project to explore the various issues around establishing such a facility. As originally stated in NSRAP's application, the goals of project were to:

- Determine if there was a need for a Rainbow Community centre in HRM, and if so
- Determine the next steps to make it happen.

The Project plan and implementation have since undergone revision which moved the project closer to meeting these original objectives.

About NSRAP

The Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project was founded in 1995 to address the many legal and political barriers still facing the LGBT community. Incorporated as a non-profit society in 2000, NSRAP has been working throughout Nova Scotia as a voice for the Rainbow Community. We believe in working collaboratively with government, business, institutions and individuals to foster change toward equity and social justice. We have developed strong links with many government departments and non-governmental organizations, especially in the areas of education, human rights, policing, legal/political affairs, health care, faith & religion, and community development.

About the Rainbow Community

The LGBT Community has always sought to embrace its own inherent diversity. From its early days, the 'gay movement' has striven for inclusivity. We have gone from "Gay" to "Lesbian and Gay" to "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Intersex, Two-Spirited, Queer, & Questioning (LGBTTI2SQ*)." Rightly defined as a community of communities, it is a big umbrella under the Rainbow.

The acronym LGBT is the most widely used and is endorsed by the style guide of the National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association; it is used, interchangeably with the phrase Rainbow Community, throughout this report. For more on these and other terms used here, please see Appendix I: Glossary of Terms.

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2.0 The Rainbow Community Centre Project

2.1. The Project Action Plan and Implementation

In 2007 the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project (NSRAP) received a \$5,000 Community Grant from HRM to study the LGBT community's attitude towards a possible Rainbow Community Centre in Halifax, and to explore possible next steps towards the establishment of such a facility. As laid out in the application, NSRAP planned to begin the process by consulting with other local LGBT organizations such as the Youth Project, the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia, prideHealth (Capital District Health Authority), and others, followed a survey of the community. NSRAP would then examine services, funding, and community engagement at LGBT community centres across Canada. Finally, the results would be presented to LGBT Nova Scotians to seek their input. As events transpired, the process evolved in order to meet the changing expectations within the community.

In 2007, NSRAP came together with other LGBT organizations to host a Town Hall meeting in November to address (among other topics) issues around establishing an LGBT community centre in Halifax. Notes of that meeting were prepared by Dan McKay, publisher of Wayves Magazine and circulated among the partner organizations.

In July of 2009 NSRAP conducted its survey at the Halifax Pride Rainbow Community Fair. Two hundred and thirty community members participated and the results were overwhelmingly in support of the idea. In September, work began on compiling the survey results. Interviews were conducted with staff at LGBT community centres in the following cities: Vancouver, B.C.; Edmonton, Alta.; Saskatoon, Sask.; Winnipeg, Man.; Hamilton, and Toronto, Ont.

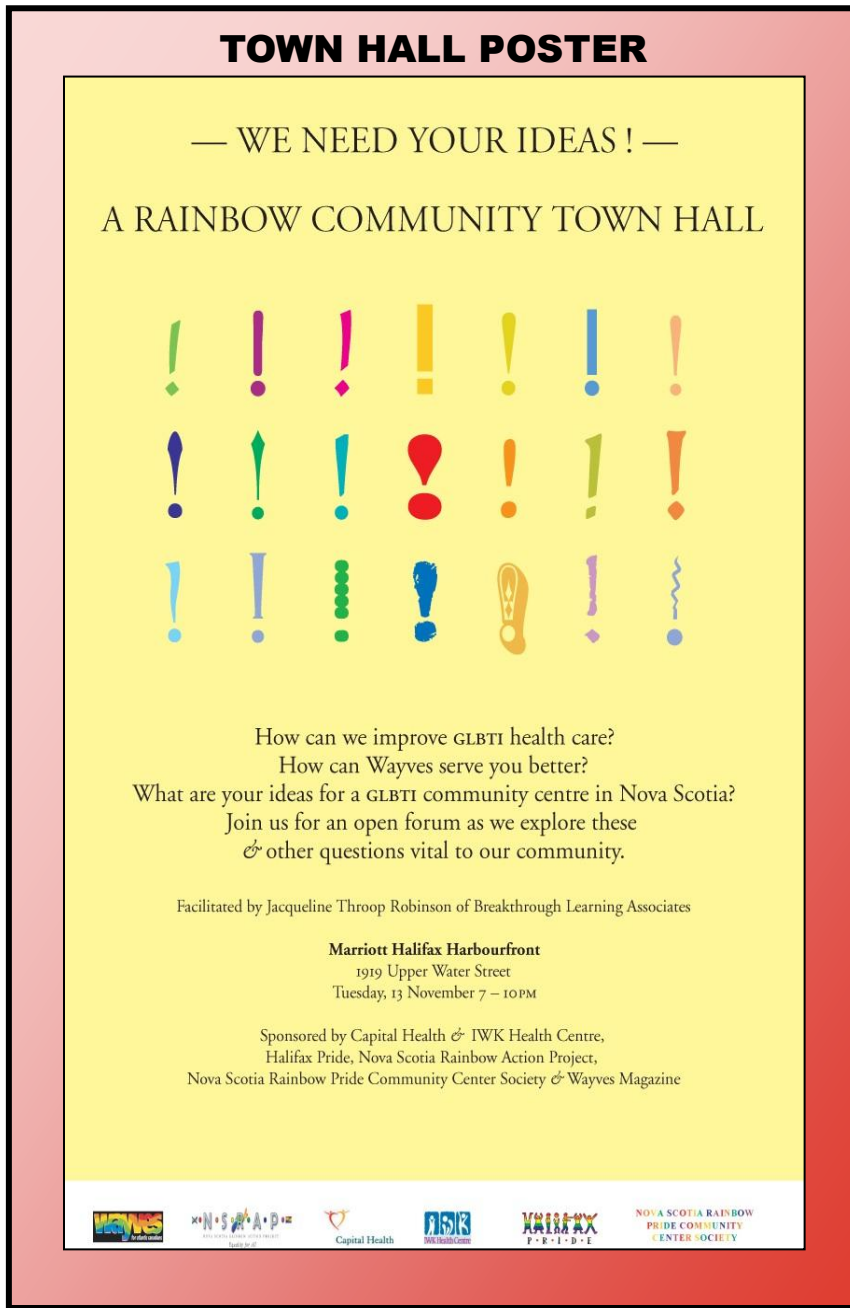
2.2. The Goals of the Project

While the process has undergone some revision, responding to the situation at the community level, the goals of the project remain essentially the same:

1. To gauge the LGBT Community's response to a possible Rainbow Community Centre in Halifax through a Town Hall meeting and a community survey;
2. To interview staff at other LGBT Community centres in Canada;
3. To present the survey results in a report to LGBT groups and service organizations and through consultation develop recommendations on how a community centre might be established, and
4. To present results to the LGBT Community at large by publishing the report and holding community meetings; to discuss the results; to create a collaborative plan to establish an LGBT community centre in Halifax, N.S.

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3.0 The Rainbow Community Centre Project Part I: An LGBT Town Hall²



NSRAP, along with other LGBT organizations (BLT Womyn of Halifax, Halifax Pride, prideHealth, and Wayves Magazine), hosted a Community Town Hall meeting in 2007. A planning committee was formed with representatives from each group and The Marriott Harbourfront provided the venue. The committee engaged Jacqueline Throop-Robinson as a professional facilitator for the meeting.

Jacqueline's approach, breaking the 65 attendees into small groups, was designed to enhance the feeling of inclusion and respectful discussion. Employing "open space technology," people were encouraged to attach themselves to the different conversations taking place simultaneously around the large meeting room.

Within the larger framework of the Town Hall where many discussions took place at once, the topic of a Community Centre attracted considerable interest. Participants offered different ideas about the centre's possible location and size; *"a large space with a gym could fill many functions and be used for rentals"*. Some suggested we look into our own local history to *"see what worked and what didn't"*. Others noted that it would have *"been great to have the Town Hall held in our own Community Centre"*. Much concern was expressed over how such a facility would be funded, and how sustainability would be ensured.

Some participants suggested that a health facility or Nurse Practitioner should be included in an LGBT community centre, along with addictions awareness programs, HIV/AIDS support, and information services. Others noted the need for a venue for social functions: men's dances; women's dances, seniors' get-togethers, etc. Some attendees suggested family services such as daycare, and some saw it as a place which the Youth Project could use for teaching or inter-generational activities. A library and cultural space were also proposed. These and other suggestions influenced the design of NSRAP's survey conducted at Halifax Pride 2009. In what follows, the responses to the survey questionnaire will frequently be seen to reflect the ideas and concerns voiced at the Town Hall.

² Poster design by Christopher Dean



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4.0 The Rainbow Community Centre Project Part II: Surveying the LGBT Community

95% SAY “WE WANT A RAINBOW COMMUNITY CENTRE!”

Would you like to see a LGBT community centre in Halifax?
218 (95%) out of 230 respondents said YES;
9 respondents (4%) answered NO; 3 (1%) were undecided.

4.1 NSRAP Community Survey, July 2009

NSRAP's team of volunteers conducted the survey at Halifax Pride's Rainbow Community Fair. 230 people received a non-alcoholic beverage in thanks for their participation. The survey included 15 main questions, many with additional sub-questions and options for multiple responses. In total, there were more than 90 possible responses on the questionnaire.

The survey questions sought to establish participants' opinions regarding the size and scope of a community centre, uses and expected challenges. Open - ended questions were posed to allow respondents the space to amplify on their concerns and aspirations regarding an LGBT centre, and to identify general issues facing LGBT Nova Scotians.

The survey reveals an evolving community: one that has shown great resolve in overcoming adversity; one that is identifying new challenges such as support for families, for Transgender issues, and LGBT seniors. Though there may be barriers ahead to establishing a community centre, the survey suggests our community is ready and willing to meet these challenges.

As stated in the Introduction, the Rainbow Community strives for inclusivity. Within the broad spectrum of individual and collective identities that make up the LGBT populace, there are bound to be competing interests. It is to be hoped that establishing a Rainbow Community Centre as a common meeting space will bring these disparate groups together. Indeed, the survey itself offers an instance of near perfect unanimity within the Rainbow's constituent communities. To the question cited above participants identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Heterosexual (Straight Allies) answered in the affirmative by huge margins.

The LGBTQ Community & Straight Allies Support a Rainbow Community Centre in HRM

Lesbians.....	100%
Gay Men.....	97%
Bisexuals.....	100%
Transgender.....	100%
Queer.....	98%
Straight Allies.....	92%

4.2.a Survey Data: Overview of Survey Participants

Participation was limited to those attending the Halifax Pride 2009 post-parade Community Fair at Garrison Grounds in downtown Halifax. The survey was designed to poll community attitudes and opinions regarding a possible LGBT Community Centre. Despite the limited demographic information collected, it can be safely concluded that a fair representation of the LGBT community present.

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Gender Identities

Question 10 of the survey asked participants about their gender identity and sexual orientation. Respondents could identify as Female or Male, as well as Gay man or Lesbian, and Transgender male or Transgender female. There was an almost equal number of men and women among the participants: 103 (45%) indicated they were male; 99 (43%) identified as female; 28 respondents (12%) chose not to subscribe to an either/or, gender-binary identity. Of these 28, 9 people chose not to answer the question at all, indicating neither gender nor sexual identities; 19 indicated a non-gendered personal identity (i.e. queer, bisexual); 2 respondents indicated they were of both genders and multiple personal and sexual identities. For want of a better category these 28 respondents have been grouped together as Gender Not Specified, or Gender NS.

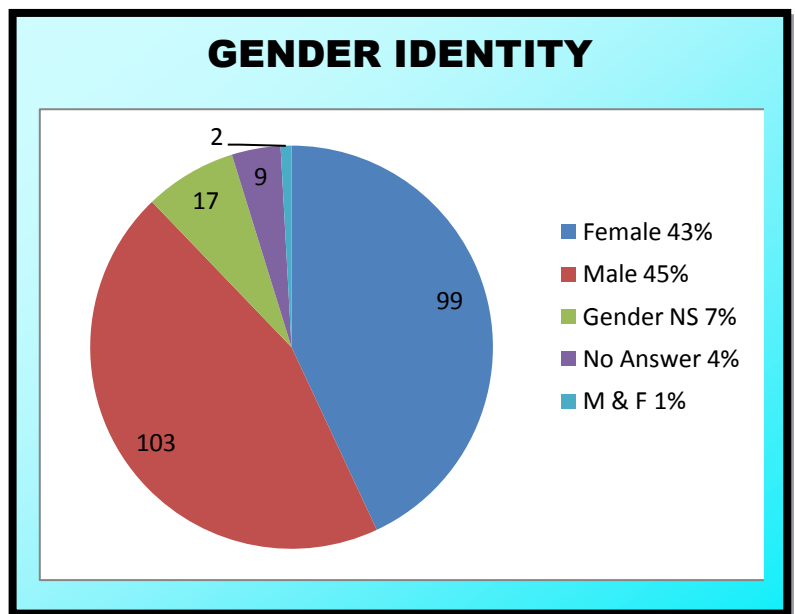
Sexual Orientation:

In addition to gender, respondents could indicate personal or sexual identifiers. Some of these were gender-based (i.e. Lesbian Woman, Gay Man), others gender-neutral (i.e. Bisexual, Heterosexual, etc.). It is interesting to note that the generally accepted statistic that non-heterosexual orientations comprise 10% of the general population is here inverted; in this survey 10% (25/230) of respondents identified as heterosexual.

Female Respondents: 99 respondents identified as female. 87 checked Female; around 40% (41/99) identified as Lesbian (10 identified solely as Lesbian, using Lesbian Woman as both gender and personal identifier); 2 identified as Transgender female.

Male Respondents: 103 respondents identified as male. 64% (66/103) identified as Gay (15 identified solely as Gay, using Gay Man as both gender and personal identifier); 7 identified as Transgender male.

Transgender Respondents: 11 respondents (5%) identified as Transgender (2 Transgender female, 7 Transgender male, 2 as both M & F).



The totals for other Personal/Sexual Identities in the survey were: Gender Variant: 7 (2%); Intersex: 1³ (0.4%); Queer: 48 (21%); Questioning: 9 (4%); Two-spirited⁴: 9 (4%) Bisexual: 32 (14%).

³ Only one respondent identified as Intersex; this participant also checked every other option under Question 10.

⁴ Two Spirit is a term employed by certain First Nations or aboriginal peoples to indicate gender or sexual variance, sometimes with a spiritual meaning attached. Please see Appendix I: Glossary of Terms for more on this subject.

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Personal Identity, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity:

It should be noted that the LGBT community allows for considerable flexibility around individual expressions of sexual orientation and gender identity. This presents a challenge for demographers and statisticians, and has even been exploited by those opposed to LGBT rights. They have misinterpreted our community's belief in an individual's right to define their own identity to somehow mean that sexual orientation is mutable and that LGBT people cannot therefore exist as a suspect class. This trait should rather be seen as an indication of the individualism and creativity with which the LGBT community has always responded to heterosexism (with its predilection for neatly labelling and regulating human sexual behaviour). Some of the creative ways in which our survey respondents defined themselves can be read below:

LGBT INDIVIDUALS ALSO SELF- IDENTIFIED AS:

*“Genderqueer; Pansexual; Asexual; Omnisexual; Homo-flexible; Lutheran;
Parent of Trans/Queer child, ally & activist; Lesbian mother;
Gay married men with child; Fagtastic!”*

Other Information about Participants

HRM residents accounted for 80% (183/230) of respondents, 20% were visiting Halifax from outside the municipality. The survey did not ask non-residents where they were from but many opted to volunteer this information. Nova Scotian respondents came from the Annapolis Valley, the South Shore, Digby, Cumberland and Colchester Counties, and Cape Breton Island. Others were visitors to Halifax from New Brunswick, Toronto and abroad.

▶ **94% (44/47) of respondents living outside the city want to see a Rainbow Community Centre established in HRM.** Only one such respondent was opposed; two were undecided.

**59 Respondents (26%) Have Previously Visited
an LGBT Community Centre**

**17 visited Toronto's The 519 Community Centre
15 named the Halifax Youth Project**

**Others listed Dalhousie Women's Centre and Dal OUT,
along with LGBT centres in Montréal, Vancouver, Edmonton, New York
City,
Atlanta, Dallas and San Francisco.**

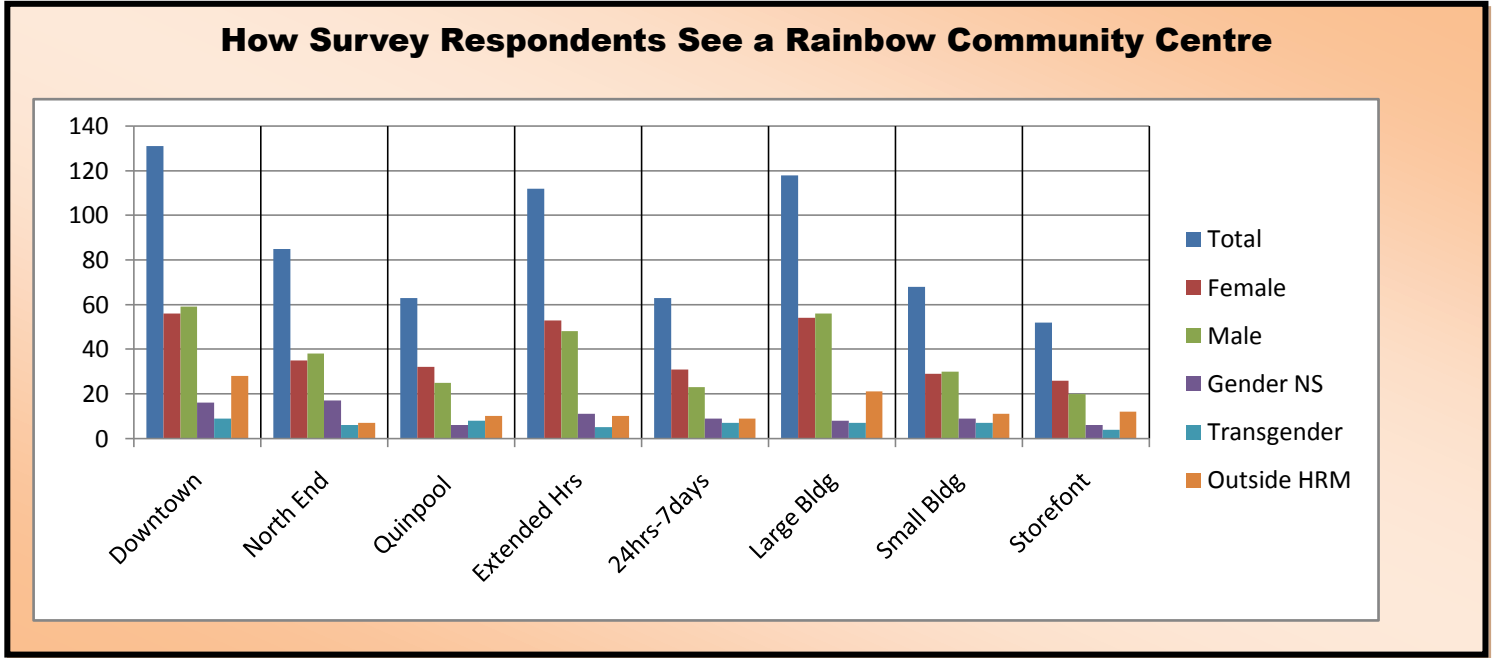
One respondent named Halifax's former centre, Radclyffe Hall.

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4.2.b How the Community Envisions an LGBT Centre

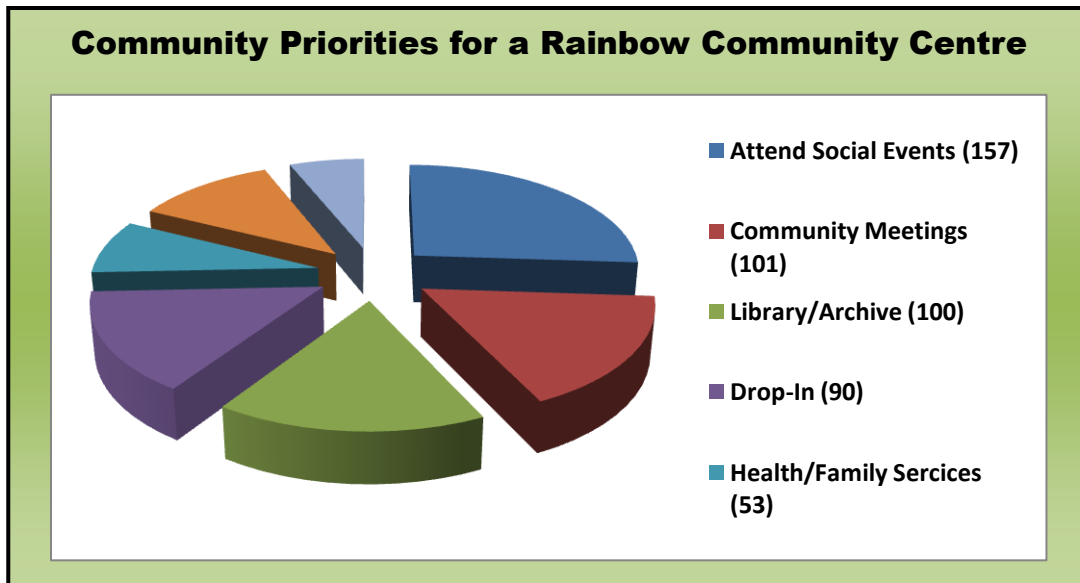
With numerous options to choose from regarding location, size, and operating hours, the community clearly stated its preference for a large, stand-alone building, located in the downtown core (Spring Garden Road, Barrington Street area), and with extended operating hours (evenings and weekends). The chart indicates how the community rated its first, second, and third choices.



4.2.c How the Community Would Use an LGBT Centre:

The clear priority among respondents is for a community space for social events and meetings. 68% (157/230) of respondents said they would use a centre to attend social gatherings.

The survey offered 25 different options for using a community centre, with ample space for participants to offer their own ideas. These 25 options can be grouped into categories such as: Community & Social Events; Health & Family Services; and Community Resources & Facilities. While every category drew relatively strong support, Community and Social Events garnered the most, Services for Families and Children (when separated from health services) the least. The chart below illustrates how respondents prioritized using a community centre.

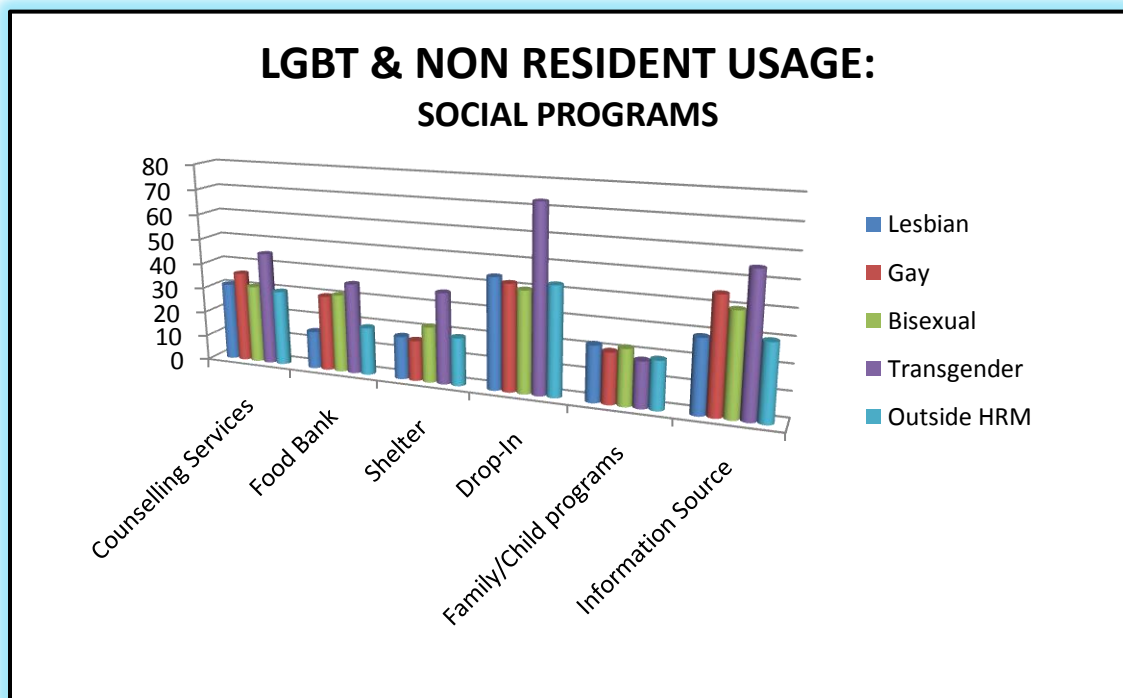
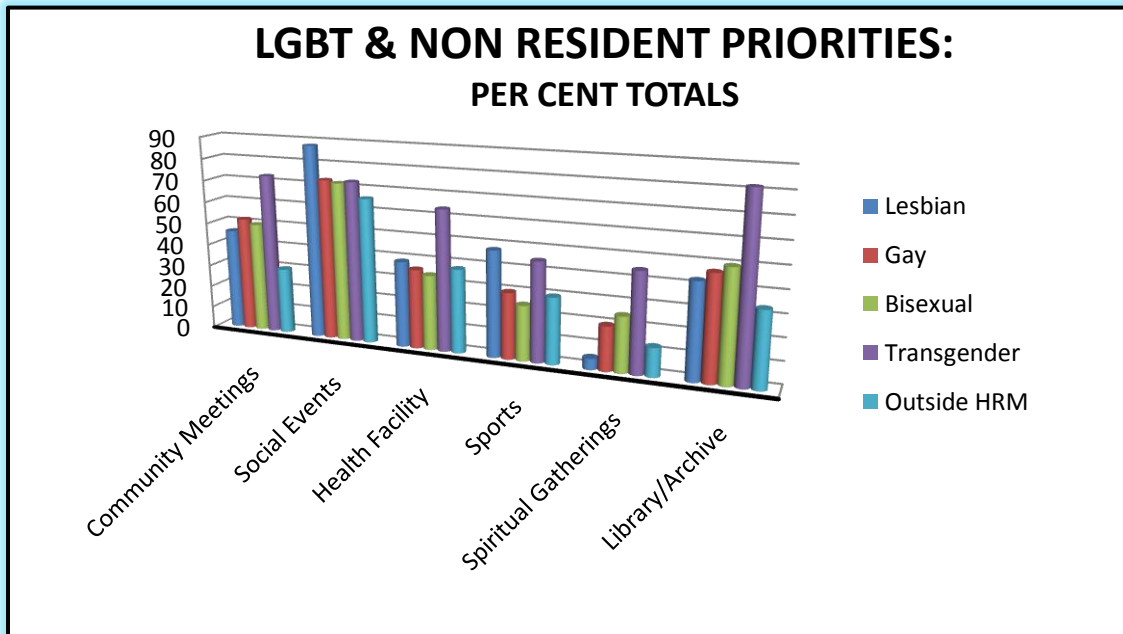


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It is perhaps more useful to examine this data from the perspective of the different stakeholder communities. Given that 20% of respondents indicated that they lived outside of HRM, the responses of non-residents also deserve serious consideration.

When examining the charts below, it may be helpful to recall that each column represents a percentage of a percentage: self-identified Lesbians accounted for 18% of all survey participants; Gay men for 29%; Bisexuals for 14%; Male & Female Transgender for 5%. Outside HRM (non residents) accounted for 20%.



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The survey reveals a strong interest in social programs and services from all sectors of the LGBT community, including those living outside HRM. Perhaps most striking is the level of desire for services on the part of those identifying as Transgender, often considered as the most marginalized sector of the LGBT community. Their expressed need for a community centre ranks highest in almost every category, except programs for families and children.

▶ **36% of Transgender respondents want a community centre to provide Food Bank and/or Shelter Services, indicating a higher degree of economic vulnerability. Regarding a Health Clinic, one Transgender participant commented that it was “Super-important!”**

40% of Respondents Want an Art Gallery or Cultural Space

Several people commented on the importance of a venue for the performing arts. HRM is host to a thriving arts community, many of whom identify as LGBT.

A truly representative LGBT centre needs to serve our artists too!

Other Uses:

- **24%: Tourist information**
- **23%: Shopping**
- **20%: Hosting personal events (weddings/parties)**
- **15%: A location for their Community organization**
- **11%: Host Community meetings**

4.2.d Possible Barriers to Use of an LGBT Community Centre.

Respondent were asked to choose from a number of potential barriers that might prevent them from using a community centre, ranging from “None that I can think of” to “I would be concerned for my physical safety.”

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGING!

Only 1% of respondents indicated any concern about ‘outing’ themselves by visiting an LGBT community centre, or that people there “might not accept me for who I am;”

Only 2% felt concerned for their personal safety.

A decade ago these numbers would have been much higher. This surely speaks to the social advances our community has made, that we no longer need to fear identifying ourselves.

▶ **61% (140/230) saw no barriers to using an LGBT Community Centre.**

Among barriers that were identified, 31 people (14%) would only visit a community centre if the location were convenient to them; 18 (8%) identified that lack of gender-neutral restrooms might pose an obstacle.

▶ **15% (34/230) of participants expressed concern that they “might not be able to afford services at a Rainbow Community Centre.” This corresponds to the percentage of those who expressed a need for social services such as a Food Bank or Shelter.**

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Very few individuals commented on other potential obstacles, although one respondent added that gender-neutral restrooms were “very important!!” Others pointed out that a centre would need to be wheelchair (“*and stroller!*”) accessible; one person remarked that it should also be scent-free.

Volunteering at an LGBT Community Centre

63% would volunteer occasionally
14% would volunteer each week
12% would volunteer to serve on the Board of Directors

4.3. Open Ended Questions:

The survey closed with five open ended questions, providing community members with an opportunity for unstructured comment.

1. *Does the idea of a Rainbow Community Centre cause you any concerns. If so what are your concerns?*
2. *What problems would you expect to encounter with respect to starting and/or maintain a Rainbow Community Centre?*
3. *Are there any groups or organizations which you think should have input into the idea of a Rainbow Community Centre?*
4. *What is the most important issue facing the Rainbow Community in Nova Scotia today?*
5. *Do you have any additional comments or concerns?*

4.3.a Identifying concerns:

86 people responded to this question; 72 explicitly stated that they had no concerns (“No”, “None”, “Nil”, etc.). Two respondents worried about funding and the long term sustainability of an LGBT centre, their comments have been factored into the responses to the next question, identifying problems.

Specific concerns identified were:

- *Could be a target for homophobia*
- *Maybe vandalism to the property?*
- *Afraid that it would fail through lack of interest*
- *Only that you won't get enough government support for this*

Other Comments:

- *Great idea! Every city needs one.*
- *All good!*
- *Love the idea!*
- *An idea whose time has passed come.*
- *Makes me warm inside!*
- *Hope.*

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4.3.b Identifying Potential Problems:

124 (55%) participants responded to this question; the majority (80) identified funding as a problem, both in starting and maintaining a community centre. Fifteen people responded that staffing and volunteers could pose a challenge; fourteen respondents thought community support was an issue. Others identified homophobia (6) as a problem. Eight respondents also identified related factors such as vandalism (3) and the NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) Factor (5) as problems.

Other ‘Potential Problem’ Comments:

“Mission statement and the reach of services.”

“Program development and delivery.”

“Cooperation between community stakeholders.”

“Getting to a consensus, our community is as diverse as any other.”

“Funding may be my only concern; Halifax is a very accepting community.”

4.3.c Community-identified stakeholders:

By a wide margin survey respondents identified the Youth Project as a key stakeholder. Out of 112 responses to this question, “which group or organization should have input into the idea of a Rainbow Community Centre,” 29 participants (26%) named the Youth Project. Next was prideHealth, 12 respondents cited the Capital District Health Authority’s LGBT health initiative. Halifax Pride, the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia, Safe Harbour Metropolitan Community Church each received 6 mentions; Women’s groups, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) each received 5. Several people identified LGBT businesses, specifically naming Venus Envy, Menz Bar and The Company House. Others identified generic stakeholders such as “government”, “health care” and “youth”.

Other Groups & Organizations

BLT Womyn of Halifax; Dal Out & University Groups;
 Gay Straight Alliances; HRM; Katimavik
 Older LGBTs; Other LGBT Community Centres;
 Rainbow Playtime;
 Stepping Stone

4.3.d Identifying Key Issues Facing Nova Scotia’s LGBT Community:

111 participants, roughly half of those surveyed, responded to what may, arguably, have been the most important question of the survey. (Certainly it was the most challenging; 11 individuals responded with “Don’t know.”).⁵

Responses tended to fall into matching categories, the positive and negative aspects of a particular issue; many identified “bigotry,” and “homophobia,” while others named “acceptance” or “respect.” If considered as mirror images of the same issue, the issue of tolerance/prejudice garnered the most attention. 47 people (42% of all who answered this question) clearly feel that we still have a way to go to achieve social acceptance.

In a related issue, several people identified the need for more education, commenting on the ignorance of the larger community in regards to LGBT history and concerns.

⁵ For the complete list of responses to this question, see Appendix III: What is the most important issue facing the LGBT Community in Nova Scotia today?

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Transgender issues were raised by eight people, several specifying that coverage of sex reassignment surgeries (SRS) by provincial health insurance was a priority. Six respondents identified health, including psychological health, as their primary issue. Only two people cited HIV/AIDS, a dramatic change in our community's priorities from recent years.

Tied directly to the concept of a community centre were responses that dealt with the need for services, but also with the community's perception of itself. These, and answers such as "fostering community identity," or "common social spaces" ranked second only to those relating to homophobia and intolerance. Several respondents wrote of a need for interactive spaces that would be an alternative to the bars or the internet. One resident from Halifax remarked that there were not enough resources for LGBT people in HRM, while a non-resident commented that LGBT resources were all concentrated in HRM and lacking outside the city.

What is the Most Important Issue Facing the Rainbow Community in Nova Scotia today?

"Still many in the closet, afraid to be themselves."

"Racism." "Overcoming discrimination within our own community."

"Sense of community. LGBT positive health care. Visible, 365 support from the mainstream community!"

*"More youth involvement." "Homophobia in parents of LGBT youth."
"The bar scene and pressure for youth to do drugs." "Homeless gay teens."*

*"Transgender issues not getting much attention;" "Sexual reassignment surgery!"
"Inclusion of Trans women!"*

"Retirement issues." "LGBT Seniors' care is the next front in the war!"

"Education" "Acceptance" "Support for LGBT families" "Ignorance of the public"

"Not allowing the community centre to happen!"

4.3. e Additional Comments:

Only 25 respondents felt they had anything to add to the survey's questions and all their remarks were of a positive nature. One person remarked "I'm not well versed in the idea of a Rainbow Community Centre, but I believe we need one." Another wrote, "Fear we're losing a sense of community, this is a great idea!" Five respondents wished NSRAP good luck! Three wrote, "Happy Pride!" We wanted to give the final say to the community member who wrote:

"Please do this!"

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4. 4. Drawing Conclusions: What the Survey Reveals

The survey results are quite clear: LGBT Nova Scotians want a community centre established in downtown Halifax; even participants from outlying regions agree that it should be centrally placed in HRM. The community envisions a large, free-standing building, in the downtown core, and open for extended hours.

The LGBT Community wants an alternative venue for socializing and recreation. They want culturally specific social services, i.e. a health facility, counselling services, and a food bank. They want a library/archive, a cultural facility and a meeting place. In other words, they want a community centre. Most participants do not foresee any barriers that might prevent them from using such a facility, but some express concern that they might not be able to afford its services.

The community is not naive about the difficulties involved in making the centre a reality. LGBT Nova Scotians recognize that funding such a centre will be a challenge. They are concerned that lack of government support will thwart their hopes for a community centre.

The community also identifies the key issues facing LGBT Nova Scotians today. Despite the extraordinary advances of recent years, as far as the LGBT Community is concerned its quest for social equality is still to be achieved. Homophobia is still the most pressing issue for LGBT Nova Scotians. Sadly, recent incidents⁶ have only confirmed that the community's concern is well founded. In this social context, a large LGBT Community Centre, located in downtown Halifax, where the Rainbow Flag flies proudly all year long would be an important and powerful symbol.

⁶ Recent homophobic incidents would include a possible 'gay-bashing' at an LGBT dance in Cape Breton, the negative responses (posted on the Globe and Mail's website, and then removed as offensive) to the Hon. Scott Brison's holiday card, featuring the Kings-Hants M. P. with his husband, Maxime St. Pierre; and the refusal to fly the Rainbow Flag during Pride celebrations by municipal or regional councils in Cumberland, Colchester, and Antigonish Counties.

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5.0 The Rainbow Community Centre Project Part III: West to East: Introduction to LGBT Community Centres across Canada

LGBT community centres can be found in Vancouver, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto, Hamilton, and Montreal. An organization has been established in Ottawa to revive their previously existing centre. The LGBT community in Calgary is also organizing around the idea of starting a centre. Many universities across the country support LGBT student groups, and these will sometimes interact with the LGBT community off-campus. Winnipeg's Rainbow Resource Centre actually began as an LGBT student organisation at the University of Manitoba. In some cities, local AIDS service organizations have occasionally filled some of the functions of a community centre.

As part of this project NSRAP interviewed staff or volunteers at most of the existing centres in Canada. Regrettably, the language barrier prevented us from interviewing staff at Gai Écoute. Several themes emerged during these conversations. Not surprisingly, the level of support from municipal and provincial governments was the determining factor in how well each centre was able to address the needs of its community. Federal funding was nearly always project driven. The strongest connections between those centres receiving stable funding seemed to be with their provincial and municipal health authorities. Toronto's 519 Community Centre is owned and operated by the city itself as part of its Board of Management, although The 519 has considerable autonomy in its programming.

The report offers a brief glimpse of each of these centres, each with its own particular set of challenges and successes. They all have one thing in common, the conviction that their work is important to the health and vitality of their communities.

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5.1 Qmunity: B.C.'s Queer Resource Centre

Vancouver, BC (Pop: 2,117,000; British Columbia: 4,420,000)

Qmunity operating revenue: Approximately \$550,000

Primary revenue sources:

- Vancouver Coastal Health
- United Way
- Fundraising
- other government sources

Number of user contacts: 30,000

Formerly known as The Centre, Qmunity (BC's Queer Resource Centre) serves and supports lesbian, gay, transgendered and bisexual people and their allies. Qmunity contributes to the health and well-being of LGBT communities through information and referrals, education, coming-out groups, social support, recovery meetings, counselling, and community development. Recently, Qmunity garnered considerable exposure as one of the hosts of Pride House, an LGBT welcoming facility for athletes, journalists and visitors, as part of Vancouver's Winter Olympics.



Programs at Qmunity include: Education and Outreach, Gab Youth, Generations Program for Aging and Older LGBT People, LGBT Victim Services, Out on the Shelves Library, Prideline (LGBT local and province-wide info & support line), and Volunteer Services. Their Education for adults programs offer a wide range of seminars from creative writing to legal will clinics. The Bute Street Clinic operates in Qmunity as a community health service drop-in staffed by nurses. A doctor is on site once a week for three hours. The clinic offers free and confidential testing for HIV, STIs and Hepatitis. It also provides:

- Pap testing, pregnancy testing, and emergency contraception;
- Free treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs);
- Hepatitis A and B vaccines, and Flu vaccines;
- Needle exchange, and
- Referrals (medical, dental, and detox programs).

According to Executive Director, Jennifer Breakspear, The Centre started with 1 full-time and 1 part-time staff person. Qmunity now employs 6 people full time, with 3 part-time staffers. While much of their revenue is consistently provided through Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, Ms. Breakspear is still heavily involved in sourcing federal and provincial grants for program-funding. Fundraising events, private donations, and sponsorships must account for around 20% of their budget.

Qmunity's major issue at present, including accessibility challenges, lies in having outgrown their second storey location. Rumours that they were considering a move outside Vancouver's West End Gay Village prompted strong reactions the community, however, this has led to a reengagement between Qmunity and its users. Following on Qmunity's success with Pride House at the Vancouver Olympics, there seem to be positive moves within Vancouver's new city government and the community itself to help source and subsidise an appropriately sized and sited venue for an expanded Qmunity.

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5.2 Pride Centre of Edmonton (PCE)

Edmonton, AB (Pop: 730,400; Alberta: 3,632,500)

The Pride Centre of Edmonton is a drop in facility and a meeting place for LGBT groups such as PFLAG, Edmonton Pride Week Society, and Alcoholics anonymous. In addition PCE offers a number of regularly scheduled meetings for different sectors of the community, Men’s and Women’s discussion groups, and TTIQ, a drop-in offering “education and support for transgender, intersexed and questioning people.” They also offer a free, weekly counselling service. Their counsellors volunteer their services and it is therefore hard for them to see clients regularly in this setting. They have (at least for the time-being) a CAP site for computer use and a library with more 2,600 titles.



YouthSpace is a drop-in for LGBT youth under 25. It has its own cozy space in the basement of the PCE and offers a safe space for youth to interact, make new friends, or just hang out. They also have a Peer Mentoring program open to any youth who is interested in helping other LGBT youth or contributing to PCE’s youth programming. This allows for youth to pursue opportunities for leadership and community engagement.

When NSRAP asked PCE Director, Will Sutherland to gauge Pride Centre’s place in the community, he cited the Seniors’ Drop-in as a major success story. At their first meeting, they had only a handful of attendees. Now more than 50 LGBT elders are regular participants.

A major challenge facing PCE is increasing the level of support from municipal, provincial and federal governments. They currently must rely heavily on Edmonton’s LGBT community and allies for support. According to Will Sutherland, they have a new Board in place that is committed to ensuring PCE’s sustainability. Among other measures, they are applying to secure charitable status from Canada Revenue Agency.

MONTHLY EXPENSES: PRIDE CENTRE OF EDMONTON

“We provide a non-judgmental, safe space where people can be themselves, find support, meet new people and be part of a community. We provide services for everyone and we need everyone’s help to keep our doors open. We do not profit from anything we offer but it costs us over \$200 per day to stay up and running. These funds come mainly from the generosity of our community.

Rent	\$ 1,600.00
Phone	\$ 250.00
Electrical	\$ 350.00
Gas	\$ 100.00
Salaries	\$ 4,000.00
Cable	\$ 70.00
Total	\$ 6,370.00

Without your support the Centre faces the possibility of closing its doors and that would be a huge loss to the community, the city and the province.”

- From the Pride Centre of Edmonton website

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5.3 Avenue Community Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity (ACC)

Saskatoon SK (Pop: 202,300; Saskatchewan: 1,035,000)

Community Funding Target: \$22,000

Number of Community Contacts: 10,000

50 LGBT “Educational Speaks” for over 3000 people

Incorporated in 1991 as Gay & Lesbian Health Services, the ACC offers a peer counselling and information line, a drop-in centre, support programs for specific groups, including transgender persons, gay & lesbian parents and queer youth, and social programming. They provide educational outreach on LGBT issues to professionals and students in schools and universities, health care, and social services agencies. They maintain programming partnerships with the Sexual Health Centre of Saskatoon, AIDS Saskatoon, and local abuse survivor service agencies. The ACC’s Peter J. Millard Library houses over 1600 titles.



The Avenue Community Centre hosts an LGBT parents group as well as:

The Trans Group: a supportive social/advocacy group for anyone who identifies as transgender, or who is questioning their gender identity.

Women’s Nite Out: ALL women, lesbian, bi, trans, non-gay, are welcome in the group. The WNO group enjoys a broad range of fun, social activities on Tuesday evenings, throughout the year.

Out & Proud Youth: for people 22 and younger, OPY is a place of safety, welcome and support for young people who are coming to grips of being young and queer.

Men’s Nite: just for men of all ages, Men’s Nite takes an evening to play games or sit around and talk about a range of topics and subjects each week, often with a unique sense of humour.

Avenue Community Centre has a tradition of rural outreach and has maintained strong relations with First Nations communities through the Two Spirit Peoples of Saskatchewan.

The ACC has 4 staff persons, including Co-Directors Bob Challis and Julie Richards, and an active volunteer program. They receive core funding from the City of Saskatoon and from the Province of Saskatchewan. They have charitable status and the United Way is one of their key funders; they also solicit online contributions through CanadaHelps.org. According to Co-Director Julie Richards, federal cuts to departments such as the Status of Women definitely had an impact on the ACC; however they have been able to access some federal dollars through the Department of justice to support their work with women dealing with intimate partner violence. The Avenue Community Centre also enjoys excellent relations with Saskatoon’s corporate community. Many of the costs associated with their annual fundraising gala are covered through these active business partnerships.

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5.4 Rainbow Resource Centre (RRC), Winnipeg, MA

Population: Winnipeg: 695,000; Manitoba: 1,200,000.

RCC Operating revenue: Approximately \$400,000

Primary revenue sources:

- 70% Manitoba Department of Health & Healthy Living
- 15% United Way
- 10% Fundraising
- 5% other government sources

Number of user contacts: 28,000

The Rainbow Resource Centre in Winnipeg grew out of a gay and lesbian student group at the University of Manitoba. In 1988 it moved off campus as the Winnipeg Gay and Lesbian Resource Centre. The name was changed to Rainbow Resource Centre (RRC) in 1999. The RRC is registered as a charitable foundation.

The RRC employs 8 staff, including an Executive Director, an Education Program Coordinator, a Youth Programming Coordinator, and two full-time counsellors. The RRC provides free counselling services for the LGBT community, education services about LGBT issues for public and private organizations, a library, a drop in, and youth programming through their Peer Project for Youth (PPY). They have an active volunteer program that operates a phone line.

The RRC's Education Program provides workshops and seminars on LGBT issues to schools, health practitioners, social service agencies and businesses. These services are offered on a cost recovery basis. Last year they met with over 9,000 people in Winnipeg, Selkirk, Brandon, Gimli, The Pas, Flin Flon, Thompson and Portage La Prairie.

Their Peer Project for Youth program (PPY), while facilitated by the RRC, is youth directed, operating in much the same fashion as Halifax's Youth Project. Indeed some of the other services provided by the RRC's Education Program, especially relating to schools and youth, are also provided in Nova Scotia by the Youth Project. The RRC's PPY has a strong arts component and has partnered with the Winnipeg Folk Festival and with AceArtinc, an exhibition/performance venue dedicated to promoting diversity in the arts. One area of difference between Halifax's Youth Project and Winnipeg's PPY is that the Rainbow Resource Centre provides major support for Camp Aurora, a four-day summer camp for LGBT and allied youth aged 14-21. In addition to the PPY Coordinator, two staff and RRC board members provided workshops for youth and volunteered at the camp last summer. 47 campers and 10 Peer Youth leaders took part, for a total of 57 youth served. An LGBT youth camp in Nova Scotia could be an area of partnership between the Youth Project and a future community centre.

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The RRC's counsellors serve 30 clients on a regular basis, with a large waiting list. They also provide one-on-one counselling at a regular drop-in and monthly counselling in Brandon, Man. According to Executive Director Chad Smith, while 30% of clients want help on "coming-out" issues relating to sexual orientation or gender identity, the majority of their clients are seeking counselling in a culturally-sensitive and responsive environment. RRC counsellors have represented Manitoba's Dept of Health at international LGBT health conferences, reporting back on issues relating to transgender health, counselling LGBT youth in foster care, and working with LGBT couples.

Prior to coming on as Executive Director, Mr. Smith coordinated an RRC project on men and domestic partner violence. *Hit Me, Hold Me: Men Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence* was coordinated by Chad Smith, in partnership with the Men's Resource Centre. The quotation below is excerpted from the Rainbow Resource Centre's 2009 AGM Report. We include this as an example of the kind of project, and partnership between organizations, that might occur at a Nova Scotian LGBT community centre; our thanks to Mr. Smith for making this available.

"The outcomes of this project were to provide both crisis and clinical counselling services to referred clients, provide education and information to clients and service providers, raise awareness, and create resources for men and for service providers. Highlights included:

- *Research and development of an inclusive narrative therapeutic group model for working with male survivors of intimate partner violence*
- *Research and development of a 72 page manual outlining the psycho-educational group model for working with men who are perpetrators of intimate partner violence in same sex relationships*
- *Workshop/presentations to staff from Probation Services; Women's Advisory Council; and to Nine Circles Community Health Centre Outreach Staff, as well as community workshops*
- *The development, completion and printing of a 5 set brochure series on the issue of men experiencing intimate partner violence for service providers, family & supports, and victims themselves*
- *Case consultations between Rainbow Resource Centre and Men's Resource Centre around client issues, crisis services through Drop In Counselling and client planning*
- *Issues of partner violence highlighted in the media, including articles in Xtra! And the Winnipeg Free Press"*

The Hit Me, Hold Me Project was also featured nationally in an in-depth article in the Globe and Mail that dealt with same sex intimate partner violence. This generated a lot of feedback/response, and resulted in still more men in Winnipeg coming forward about their experiences in abusive relationships.

We asked Mr Smith to comment on what impact a hypothetical closure of the RRC might have on the community. By way of example, he recounted the experience of a few years back when the RRC faced a significant funding cut. Counselling staff had to be laid off. 30 people were forced to seek counselling from other sources, finding themselves back on waiting lists in the middle of their course of treatment. The RRC was able to document the negative effect upon their clients and present their findings to funders; within 18 months funding was not only restored but increased.

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4.5 The Well.

Hamilton, ON (Pop: 505,000; Ontario: 13,150,000)

Among other services, The Well offers:

“Trans Peer Support Group: Welcomes all who identify as transgender, transsexual, trans, bigender, third gender, intersex, genderqueer, FtM, MtF, cross-dresser, transvestite, two-spirited, boi, t-girl, t-boy, or questioning!”

Lesbian and Bi Women Peer Support Group: A drop-in night for lesbians, bisexual women or any woman who is in the process of defining or redefining her sexuality.

The purpose of the group is to provide peer support and a safe space for lesbian and bisexual women to meet, talk, and socialize together.”



In 2004, a gay business owner in Hamilton experienced a brutal attack at the hands of a man who was subsequently found guilty of a hate crime. Due to the severity of the assault, donations were sent in to cover what looked to be inevitable costs for reconstructive surgery. When (through the generosity of a local plastic surgeon), the money was no longer required for that purpose, the businessman decided that the money should be used to establish a place where the community could access LGBT health and wellness resources.

In addition to the initial community contribution, The Well received funding through Ontario’s Trillium Foundation. The Trillium Foundation remains their largest public funder, but they have also developed “social revenue” by offering diversity training through their “Positive Space” and “Transgender 101” workshops. They have developed a particularly good relationship with local school boards. These workshops accounted for more than a third of their revenue in the last fiscal year. They have charitable status and are able to seek online donations through a link on their website to *Canada-Helps.org*. They currently operate on approximately \$65,000/year.

At this stage of their existence, The Well is supporting targeted community drop-ins for youth, women and the transgender community. Their transgender group regularly has 20 people in attendance, with a mailing list of over 50. Recognizing the economic marginalization that often attends this community, they now offer a hot meal at these meetings.

The Well is operated by a small but highly motivated volunteer Board of Directors with one part time Programming Coordinator. They are also embarking on a job search for a Volunteer Coordinator. The Programming Coordinator has a Masters in Social Work and is therefore able to provide some counselling service. They have a strong relationship with a community member who is also a psychiatrist and who approached The Well about offering counselling. All of this has led to a determination to increase their mental health services. According to Co-Chair D. Dixon, The Well is building partnerships with Rainbow Health Ontario and with McMaster University. They are looking to have two counsellors trained and certified to handle e-counselling. This is an exciting development that could have important applications for LGBT Nova Scotians living in rural areas.

The Well came into existence in the heat of the community’s response to a terrible crime. Their current board of directors is pursuing a careful and disciplined strategy to increase their programming and their capacity to deliver services beyond their downtown core. Despite Hamilton’s proximity to Toronto, there is a considerable need for The Well’s services throughout South-Western Ontario.

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5.6 The 519 Church Street Community Centre

Toronto, ON (Pop: 2,503,300; Ontario: 13,150,000)

Annual operating revenue: \$2,233,000

Revenue sources:

- City of Toronto - Core Funding 55%
- Government Grants 19%
- Donations and Fundraising 13%
- United Way 11%
- Members, Rental and User Fees 2%

The 519 is a City of Toronto Board of Management facility, with a negotiated agreement with the city which allows them to support both their local community, as well as providing services geared towards LGBT people. They recently completed a significant expansion and remodelling. The 519's office manager, Helen Rykens: "We do get some federal funding for our children's programs - these are drop in programs for parents and kids, and we get HRSDC money for our summer camp. The City funded approximately 1/2 of our expansion; the rest was raised through private donations through our Honorary Patron, [Toronto businessman and philanthropist] Salah Bachir. He made a large donation himself and brought his friends on board."



The 519 is located at the heart of Toronto's downtown Gay Village, in the Church-Wellesley area. This neighbourhood boasts the largest concentration of LGBT people in Canada. The 519's evolution took place alongside the LGBT community's quest for civil and social equality. The 519 was one of the first places in Canada to offer services for LGBT youth; it was at the heart of the community's response to the now-infamous "bathhouse raids" of 1981⁷ it has provided meeting and rehearsal space for groups such as Pride Toronto and Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. In 2008/09, 185 community groups and organizations met at The 519.

The 519 has been recognized internationally for the quality and innovation of their programs and services. Their Community Services Program offers Trans Sex Worker Outreach, Queer Immigrant and Refugee Support, Free Professional Counselling, Trans Training and Support, Anti-Violence Training and Support, Anti-Poverty and Older LGBT Programs. Almost 5,000 children and families have visited their Family Resource Centre; nearly 15,000 meals were served at their Sunday-Drop-in. 535 private counselling sessions were provided by 22 professionally trained volunteer counsellors.

The sheer volume of offerings at The 519 may seem daunting when compared with other centres, let alone with the near-total absence of such services in Atlantic Canada. However, the lesson to be drawn from The 519 is that the scope of their programming exists in direct response to both the neighbourhood's and the LGBT community's expressed needs. It is the scale of The 519's output that is so impressive. An LGBT community centre in Nova Scotia should be able to offer many of these same programs, but on a scale proportional to our community's requirements.



⁷ Code named "Operation Soap; on February 5, 1981, Toronto Police simultaneously raided 4 gay bathhouses as "common bawdy houses." The community response was swift and furious, thousands took to the street in protest; demonstrations stopped traffic and stymied police attempts at crowd dispersal. The event has been likened to the Stonewall Riot in terms of galvanizing the LGBT rights movement in Canada.

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5. 7. Drawing Conclusions from Other LGBT Centres

Each Community Centre that we spoke with offered some or all of these services: therapeutic counselling; a help and information telephone service; facilitated discussion groups; support groups for the Transgender Community; activities for older LGBTs; and, programming for LGBT youth. Vancouver, Saskatoon, Winnipeg and Toronto all seemed to offer some programming to deal with violence, whether it was dealing with homophobic attacks or intimate partner violence.

Each centre also serves as a resource to the non-LGBT community, offering diversity training and workshops on LGBT issues for government agencies and the private sector. These education programs offer a small source of revenue, but are most often provided on a cost-recovery basis. Far beyond any revenue they may provide, is their value in connecting the centre to its larger community, and demystifying the LGBT population in the process.

In looking at models that could be adapted to suit an LGBT centre in Halifax, both the Avenue Community Centre in Saskatoon and the Rainbow Resource Centre in Winnipeg are of particular interest. Both community centres are in major urban centres but try to serve non-urban LGBT people as well. One cannot help but note the strong provincial support for Winnipeg's RCC, and the mix of municipal, provincial, and corporate support for Saskatoon's LGBT centre. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia are of a similar population size. Our three provinces also share another determining economic factor; we are all far removed from the concentrated financial clout of LGBT communities in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. There is no question that all LGBT centres need strong support from government funders, municipal and provincial. There is also no doubt that those of dwelling in cities on the Canadian fringe, as it were, need to be a especially resourceful in engaging both community and government support.

If we are to achieve this dream of creating a community centre in Nova Scotia, we must work closely with the community itself. However that alone will not be enough, we must have a strong commitment from government to support our efforts. As one administrator we interviewed remarked, "We were lucky in 1975 to have City Councillors who were progressive enough to take the neighbourhood initiative and create this... otherwise it would not have happened. You will need politicians either City or Provincial on side."

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6.0 Recommendations:

- a. **NSRAP should immediately establish** an independent Community Centre committee to move the project forward. Working initially under the umbrella of NSRAP, this committee should begin investigating different governance models and drafting a mission statement, policies and bylaws;
- b. **Set about** the establishment of a charitable foundation as a fundraising arm of a future community centre;
- c. **Initiate** discussion with all LGBT and allied service organizations, including those outside of HRM, to ensure full cooperation throughout the establishment of an LGBT Centre, full collaboration thereafter, and to avoid duplication of services;
- d. **Initiate** discussion with all three levels of government to seek the establishment of a permanent LGBT Community Centre in downtown Halifax;
- e. **Seek** collaboration with community partners, pending the creation of an actual facility, in establishing much needed service and social groups, i.e. LGBT Elders, Health Services (including Transgender Services), LGBT Arts, Culture and Heritage;
- f. **Identify** health and social sector practitioners who might provide counselling or other services at an LGBT Community Centre;
- g. **Consult** with the Youth Project to explore how they work to connect with communities outside of Halifax. NSRAP must ensure that the services of a future LGBT Community Centre are available to all LGBT Nova Scotians;
- h. **Pursue** stronger ties with all LGBT social and service organizations across Nova Scotia: and
- i. **Finally, NSRAP must reinvigorate the struggle against homophobia.** The community has identified homophobia as a primary concern. NSRAP must forge partnerships with all level of governments, public and private sector unions, and the community at large to address ongoing problems associated with homophobia and transphobia across all sectors of Nova Scotian society.

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7.0 Closing Remarks

“Unless you are under 25, or you have HIV/AIDS, there is no central resource/service facility for LGBT people anywhere in Atlantic Canada.”

LGBT Canadians are integrally woven into the social and economic fabric of our national culture. Where our communities are allowed to flourish, we can make significant, lasting contributions to Canadian society. As the review of existing centres in Part III has shown, a community facility that offers services geared towards the needs of gender and sexual minorities is a significant factor in the empowerment of LGBT communities. Furthermore, through outreach and educational services to the broader community, through their visible presence, they help to break down the lingering barriers of homophobia and misunderstanding.

All of the LGBT centres described above offer some programming for youth under 25. Nova Scotia is fortunate in having the Youth Project already in place, providing many of these services. The AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia also offers counselling to its members. It is also true that HRM can boast of the Capital District Health Authority’s prideHealth, formerly the GLBTTI Health Initiative, which operates a website and has a nurse doing outreach in various LGBT venues around the city (indeed, this suggests an obvious partnership with a future LGBT centre). Still, there need be no concern about duplicating these efforts; there is more than enough work for an LGBT community centre to undertake in HRM, and throughout the province. Every LGBT centre in Canada offers some or all of these services: counselling for adults; Transgender support; programming for LGBT seniors; meeting space for community groups, including LGBT-focused addiction services and educational resources. These services can often be accessed through toll-free lines for those living outside of metropolitan centres. These services are available in every province in Canada, right up to the Québec-New Brunswick border. However, unless you are under 25 or you have HIV/AIDS, there is currently no central resource/service facility for LGBT people anywhere in Atlantic Canada.

The LGBT Community in Nova Scotia is far from naive. We know that the absence of stable funding, societal pressures, and a possible lack of political support will all present significant challenges to the creation and maintenance of our community centre. Yet, despite all this, our community dares to dream of a large, visible, LGBT centre in the heart of Nova Scotia’s historic capital. It falls to those who serve the Rainbow Community to see that “this dream that it dares to dream” really does come true.



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Towards a Home for the LGBT Community in Nova Scotia The Rainbow Community Centre Project

Appendices

Appendix I: Glossary of Terms

Rainbow Community/LGBT Community: The term Rainbow Community takes its name from the Rainbow Flag, an internationally recognized symbol of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Community. There are many acronyms used by, for and about our community, including GLBTTI2SQ* (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, intersex, two-spirit, queer & questioning). LGBT is the acronym most commonly used and is recommended by the style guides of the Canadian Press and the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association. The two terms are interchangeable and both acknowledge the diversity inherent within our “community of communities.” For more about the different communities that comprise the LGBT Community and about the **Rainbow Flag**, please use the alphabetical listings provided below.

AIDS: Acronym for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, a medical condition that affects the human immune system. It is caused by a virus, the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and leaves the body vulnerable to opportunistic infections. There are medical treatments that can slow the rate at which the immune system is compromised. Often written as HIV/AIDS. See **HIV**.

Ally: Used to describe a person, usually heterosexual, who supports LGBT people in their continuing struggle for civil rights and social equality.

Allies Program: The Allies Program is a program that seeks to place easily-identified people who can serve as go-to resources for people who need to express issues or concerns relating to LGBT matters. After going through certification, a person identifies themselves as an ally and that their office space is a “safe space” where LGBT issues can be discussed securely and in confidence. In Nova Scotia, the Allies Program is administered through the Youth Project. NSRAP hopes to adapt this program for use in other institutions, i.e. long-term care facilities.

Bisexual: An individual who may be attracted to both sexes; as an adjective, of or relating to sexual and affectional orientation towards both sexes. Attraction to both sexes does not presume non-monogamy.

Cisgender: a neologism describing a person whose gender identity conforms to their biological or assigned birth gender; used in contrast to **transgender**. See **Transgender**.

Closet, In The Closet: Refers to person(s) who wishes to keep his/her/their sexual orientation or gender identity a secret, likely from expressions such as “skeleton in the closet” referring to a shameful secret.

Coming Out: Coming out of the closet (more often just “coming out”) is the process by which gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons begin first to accept and then to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Someone who publicly acknowledges their LGBT identity is referred to as “out”. Coming out also refers to a society debutante’s “Coming Out”. In the early years of the 20th Century, lesbians and gay men in New York would hold “Coming Out Balls” where those newly “out” could introduce themselves to the community. This tradition is carried on within the Drag community.

Drag, Drag Performers/Artists, Drag King, Drag Queen, etc.: Usually used in connection with the practice of dressing in the clothes of persons of the opposite sex, often for performance purposes. Drag Performers are entertainers who adopt the dress and mannerisms, often in an exaggerated or parodic style, commonly associated with the opposite sex (drag kings for female performers, drag queens for males). Some drag artists, such as Craig Russell and Ru Paul have achieved international stature. Drag occasionally refers to a costume, often, but not necessarily, of the opposite sex.

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Fag, Faggot: A pejorative word for gay men, may relate to the fact that up until the 17th Century, gay men were often burned at the stake. It is still the most commonly used insult bandied about by Canadian schoolchildren. In recent years, some gay men are trying to reclaim the word from its oppressive connotations, i.e. the survey respondent who identified as “Fagtastic!”.

Gay: An adjective that has largely replaced “homosexual” in the daily use. It is not a noun, there is no such group as “the Gays.” While it can be used as an umbrella term for those who are sexually and affectionally same-sex oriented, it is most often associated with men. For women, “Lesbian” is the preferred adjective. To refer to both sexes, while “gay men and women” is acceptable, “lesbians and gay men” is certainly preferred.

Gay Straight Alliances/GSAs: Found in middle schools, high schools and universities throughout North America, these clubs bring LGBT and straight students together to work collaboratively on issues such as ending discrimination and bullying based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Gender Identity: A person’s psychological and emotional sense of being male or female; not necessarily the same as one’s biological identity. See **Cisgender**.

Heterosexism: The presumption that heterosexuality is the universal and superior orientation of humankind; also the prejudice and/or discrimination that stems from this presumption. The related word, **heteronormative**, presumes that heterosexuality is the normal and natural sexual orientation for human beings, inferring that anything else is deviant.

Heterosexual: As a noun, refers to a person whose sexual and/or affectional orientation is towards the opposite sex; vernacular term is “straight.”

HIV: Human immunodeficiency virus, the virus that causes AIDS (“HIV virus” is a redundancy). “HIV positive” means that one has been infected by the virus, but not necessarily having AIDS.

Homophobia: Fear, hatred or dislike of homosexuality, lesbians and gay men. LGBT people around the world have set aside May 17 as the International Day Against Homophobia. On May 17, 1992, the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from its list of classifiable mental illnesses. Since 2006, NSRAP has marked this day of action with cultural events and political rallies, including wrapping the offices of the Municipality of Pictou County in a giant Rainbow Flag.

Homosexual: As a noun, refers to a person whose sexual and/or affectional orientation is towards the same sex; as an adjective, of or relating to sexual and affectional same-sex orientation. It is considered to be a clinical term, used only if and when the word “heterosexual” would appear in a parallel construction, as in a medical context. In any other circumstance gay, gay men, lesbian, or lesbian and gay should be used.

Intersex: An adjective, describes persons born with sex chromosomes, external genitalia, or a reproductive system that is not considered standard for either male or female. Parents and physicians often seek to determine the sex of intersex children through surgery and/or hormone treatments. Many intersex adults seek an end to this practice.

Lesbian: Preferred term, both as noun and adjective, for women whose sexual and affectional orientation is towards other women.

LGBT: Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. Of the many acronyms employed by and about the Rainbow Community (“GLBT,” “GLBTTI2SQ*”), it is the most commonly used, followed by LGBTQ, which includes those who identify as “queer”. See **Queer**; also above: **Rainbow Community**.

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Pride (Day, Week, and/or Parade): This is an annual celebration of the rights, history, and culture of the LGBT community. It commemorates the Stonewall Riots of June 28, 1969. Pride events usually take place in the summer and are held in towns and cities around the world, including many jurisdictions (such as the USA, China, and Eastern Europe) where LGBT people do not enjoy the rights and freedoms of their Canadian counterparts. See **Stonewall**.

Queer: Originally a derogatory term for gay, since the early 1990s has been reclaimed by many in the LGBT community. It is most often favoured by young people, and those within the creative and cultural communities. Its meaning is understood to not specify any one sexual orientation, but rather that a person identifying as queer rejects the hetero-normative definition of humanity. A person who rejects traditional gender behaviour roles and/or stereotypes will sometimes identify as “genderqueer.” Nonetheless, queer remains a highly charged word when used as an epithet, especially amongst older gay men and lesbians.

Questioning: A term that may be employed by those still questioning their gender identity or sexual orientation. The Rev. Irene Moore, in a column for the Anglican theological website writes: “like LGBT people, this sexual [orientation] group also transgress heteronormativity.” People who identify as questioning “may not see or identify themselves as heterosexuals. However, they also do not identify themselves socially, politically, or culturally as LGBT because they are questioning their sexual identity.”⁸

Rainbow Flag, Pride Flag: Designed in 1978 by San Francisco artist Gilbert Baker for that city’s Gay Freedom Day, the flag originally carried eight horizontal stripes (the pink and turquoise stripes have since been removed). Despite its local origins, the Rainbow Flag has become an internationally recognized ensign for the LGBT Community. Mr. Baker intended each colour to symbolize the following attributes: red (life); orange (healing); yellow (sunlight); green (nature); indigo (harmony); violet (spirit). The pink stripe stood for Eros and the turquoise for art and magic. While Mr. Baker may have been influenced by a flag denoting the races of the world which was popular at peace marches in California, it is generally believed that the flag was inspired by the Judy Garland song, “Somewhere over the Rainbow” from the movie *The Wizard of Oz*. Miss Garland was an icon to the gay community, and the film has often been interpreted as a metaphor for **coming out**. Although no longer as prevalent as the flag it inspired, the song remains an unofficial anthem for the international Rainbow Community. The flag has often been a source of controversy. In recent years, several jurisdictions in Nova Scotia have passed legislation that prevents any flag other than those of government being flown at government buildings. Despite their claims of fairness, these moves have generally been seen by the LGBT Community as motivated by homophobia and with the goal of avoiding flying the Rainbow Flag during local Pride Weeks.

SRS: Sex reassignment surgery (surgeries) is the surgical procedure (s) whereby a person’s sex characteristics are altered. See **Transgender**, **Transition**, and **Transsexual**.

Sexual Orientation: A person’s innate sexual and/or affectional attraction. Do not use sexual preference.

Stonewall Riots: These riots took place in June, 1969. New York City Police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village. While neither the first public demonstration for gay rights, nor the first time that LGBT people fought back against state oppression, these riots are considered to be the beginning of the modern LGBT civil rights movement.

⁸ www.thewitness.org/agw/monroe092904.html

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Straight: Commonly used term to describe heterosexuals. Heterosexuals who support LGBT people in the struggle for civil rights and social justice were sometimes referred to as “straight-but-not-narrow,” now more frequently called “straight allies.”

Transgender: Describes people whose gender identity or expression may not be the same as the gender they were assigned at birth. In the 1980s and 90s the term was expanded to serve as an umbrella term, a means of uniting all those who have at some point not conformed to gender norms. The term took on a political aspect used to question the validity of those norms, or to pursue equal rights and anti-discrimination legislation. The term continues to evolve. While transgender can be used as an umbrella term to include people who are intersex, preoperative and postoperative transsexuals, as well those who choose not to go through SRS, some persons may prefer to be described as **Transsexual** or **Intersex**. See **Intersex** and **Transgender**.

Transition: The process by which one alters one sex; this may include and all aspects of hormone therapies, SRS, and changes of legal identity.

Transsexual: An individual who identifies as himself or herself as a member of the opposite sex. Transsexuals can be of any sexual orientation. Transsexuals who have completed the transition process may no longer identify as transsexual or transgender.

Two Spirit: A term used by some First Nations people to describe those believed to possess both masculine and feminine natures. Some Two Spirit people may also identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender; the term should not be used as a blanket term for LGBT aboriginals. Its use by non-aboriginals is also deemed offensive by many First Nations people who see it as an inappropriate use of their spiritual heritage.

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Appendix II: A (Very!) Brief Account of LGBT Community Action in Nova Scotia

In the Beginning ...

In 1972 the **Gay Alliance for Equality (GAE)** was founded by a coalition of lesbians and gay men. One of its first undertakings was to set up a phone service for Nova Scotia's gay and lesbian community called **Gayline**; this was in essence the first community centre for sexual and gender minorities in Nova Scotia. **GAE** incorporated as a not-for-profit society one year later. They organized community dances and in 1976 began operating **The Turret Club**⁹ as a gay, lesbian and bisexual dance club (and meeting space) in the Khyber Building on Barrington Street. In 1982 they transferred the club, renamed **Rumours**, to a location on Granville Street. Revenue generated from the club meant that **GAE** was one of the richest lesbian and gay community groups in North America. In 1983 they began publishing a monthly community newspaper called the **Gaezette**, and were able to fulfill a long standing ambition by purchasing a house in Halifax's North End and opening **Radclyffe Hall**¹⁰ as the first Lesbian and Gay Community Centre in Nova Scotia.



Radclyffe Hall housed the office for **Gayline**, as well as the **GAE/GALA** library. It was used for meetings of **GAE** and other gay-related organizations, for workshops, for alcohol-free social events, and one summer for a youth outreach project with two part-time employees. In 1985 **Radclyffe Hall** was sold to facilitate the purchase of a larger location for **Rumours** on Gottingen Street. In 1988 **GAE** was renamed the **Gay and Lesbian Association of Nova Scotia (GALA)**. By 1994, its energies sapped by internal debates along with having to manage **Rumours**, **GALA** dissolved. The **Gaezette** continued to publish under its new name, **Wayves**.

Many things changed in the years between 1972 and 1994. Our community embraced its own diversity, identifying as the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Two-Spirited, Intersex, Queer & Questioning Community (LGBT2SIQQ*) or Rainbow Community. In 1988 Halifax celebrated its first Pride Week. In 1991 the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act was amended to include protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation. Throughout the 1980s and 90s, along with LGBT communities throughout the world, we faced the devastating impacts of HIV/AIDS. Despite terrible losses Nova Scotia's LGBT community continued to grow in strength and capacity, winning significant victories during those dark years - often in the face of strong political opposition.

In 2009, LGBT people around the world commemorated the 40th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots (see Appendix 2). It was a double anniversary for Canadians, as we also celebrated the 1969 decriminalization of homosexual acts by then Justice Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau. In 2009 Halifax Regional Council recognized Halifax Pride as one of the city's Hallmark Events and Nova Scotia Premier Darrell Dexter marched in Pride Parade.

⁹ The Turret's logo was designed by Rand Gaynor. Source: gay,hfxns.org

¹⁰ **Radclyffe Hall** took its name from the British author of the 1928 Lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness*. The book was judged obscene by the courts, despite its lack of sexual content, for depicting Lesbian love as "natural, sacred and good." It was not freely available in England until 1972.

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The Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project

Following the demise of GALA, with many legal, political, and social barriers still in place, the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project was founded in 1995. Incorporated as a non-profit society on February 17, 2000, NSRAP has been working since 1995 throughout Nova Scotia as a voice for the Rainbow Community. We believe in working collaboratively throughout the Community and with government, business, institutions, and individuals to foster change. We have developed strong links with many government departments and non-governmental organizations, especially in the areas of education, human rights, policing, legal/political affairs, health care, faith & religion, and community development.



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Appendix III: What is the most important issue facing the LGBT community in Nova Scotia today?

1. Bigotry, misinformation, criticism within the community (not gay enough, not fitting a type)
2. Intolerance
3. Acceptance (ensuring of by the wider community)
4. Common Social activities
5. Acceptance (“why do you need a Pride Day, people?”)
6. Lack of motivation for community events
7. Young people, general public
8. Celebration of diversity/families
9. Still many in the closet ... afraid to be themselves
10. Adversity
11. Health
12. Acceptance getting better
13. Fostering community identity, basic spaces for social interaction, resource/info sharing
14. Money
15. Overcoming discrimination in our community, educating others
16. Support
17. ?
18. Seniors (aging), youth
19. ?
20. Health
21. Acceptance
22. Not much resources in the city
23. Homeless gay teens
24. Trans sex reassignment surgeries (SRS)
25. Numerous. Too many perspectives to choose one
26. Sense of community, LGBT positive health services, visible 365 mainstream support
27. Cohesiveness
28. Prejudice
29. Visibility
30. Acceptance
31. Bigotry (maybe)
32. Lack of opportunities to socialize. Bars are terrible. Nice to socialize outside bars and internet.
33. Yes
34. Education
35. Lack of resources outside of HRM
36. Health (access, education, etc.), work
37. Sense of community
38. Violent crime? Resources
39. Discrimination
40. Acceptance (for all), diversity within
41. Tolerance
42. Public awareness
43. Lack of knowledge
44. Don't know
45. Internalized homophobia
46. Acceptance
47. SRS coverage
48. Transgender issues
49. Health (knowledge of issues and importance of action by each person for their own health)
50. Trans rights
51. Trans women (inclusion of)
52. Psychological health
53. Support

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54. Money!
55. Harassment in schools
56. Acceptance of different cultures
57. Visibility
58. NOTHING!
59. More positive exposure
60. Homophobia
61. In university I never really had a problem here
62. Equality
63. More youth Involvement!!!
64. Transgender issues not getting much attention
65. Discrimination, access to health care
66. Prejudice
67. Lack of awareness
68. Don't know
69. Acceptance & ignorance
70. Acceptance & respect
71. Equality, AIDS
72. ?
73. Homophobia, STIs, stereotypes and lack of family support
74. Education
75. Acceptance
76. Ignorance of the public
77. Ignorance, patriarchy
78. Don't know
79. Don't know
80. Acceptance
81. Respecting diversity within the community, social issues. Income issues
82. ?
83. Not sure
84. Homophobia, resources
85. Manpower, money, full interest
86. Funding
87. Organization, dedicated individuals
88. Cohesiveness, participation
89. Don't live here - unsure
90. Becoming more visible
91. HIV
92. Depends on sub-group (young out, married parent)
93. Ignorance
94. Ignorance of Trans issues. The bar scene and pressure on youth to do drugs
95. Homophobia in parents of LGBT youth
96. Equality
97. Equality
98. Having a safe space
99. Seniors' care is the next front in the war
100. Health care, retirement issues
101. Having a safe space (local)
102. Cohesiveness, funding
103. Stigma
104. Not allowing it (LGBT community centre) to happen
105. Isolation for those of us in rural areas, especially youth
106. Don't know
107. Youth, comfort for coming out
108. Accessible services, trans support
109. Discrimination, lack of population, (all) in one main area
110. Visibility
111. United voice



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Contact Information

If you wish to comment on this report, or if you would like to learn more about NSRAP and its activities, please feel free to contact us at any time.

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