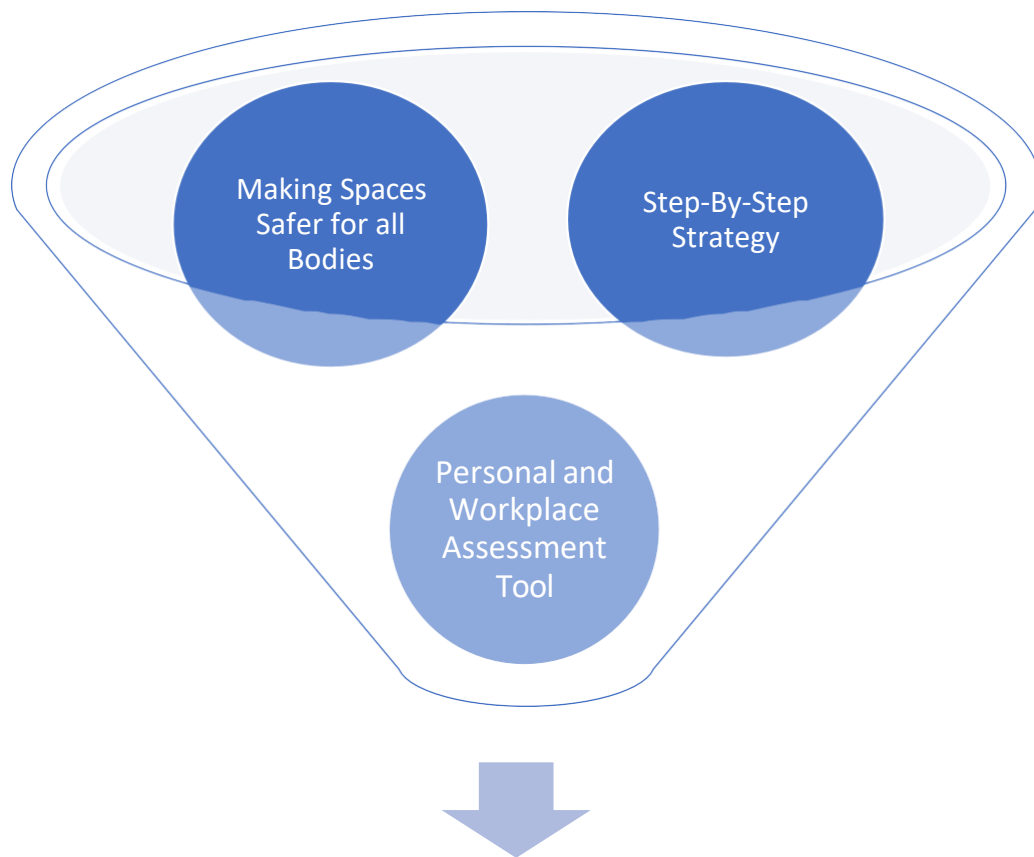




TRULY ALIVE YOUTH AND FAMILY FOUNDATION INC

LGBTQ+ Newcomer Safer Space Strategy

Creating Safer Spaces for LGBTQ2+ New Canadians in Saskatoon and Area



A brief resource guide for community-based organizations
serving new Canadians in Saskatoon and Area

Developed by Truly Alive Youth and Family Foundation Inc (TAYFFI)

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| 1 Introduction | 3 |
| 2 Assessment | 4 |
| 2.1 Personal Assessment Tool | 4 |
| 2.2 Workplace Assessment Tool | 5 |
| 3 Cultural Competency and Support Training in the Workplace | 5 |
| 3.1 Step-By-Step Strategy | 6 |
| 4 Positive Space Environmental Design | 6 |
| 4.1 Key Components | 6 |
| 4.2 Key Considerations | 7 |
| 5 Educational Opportunities | 9 |
| 5.1 OUTSaskatoon Workshops | 9 |
| References | 10 |

1 Introduction

LGBTQ2S+ newcomers face particular challenges, both within newcomer-serving organizations as well as LGBTQ2S+ organizations (Giwa and Chaze 2019, O’Neill and Sproule 2011). Safe, welcoming, and appropriate services for gender- and sexually- diverse newcomers are vital, as these groups may experience racism within the LGBTQ2S+ community as well as homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia within their communities and in society at large (Ghabrial 2017). Working towards providing safe, positive spaces for LGBTQ2S+ newcomers on Treaty 6 Territory must include a commitment to continuously developing better behaviours, attitudes, policies, and practices.

The following sections gather resources that will be of use to community-based organizations wishing to work toward safer spaces for LGBTQ2S+ new Canadians. This work aims to provide tools for organizations and individuals within organizations to reflect on areas to improve in allyship and services for LGBTQ2S+ people, specifically a Personal and Workplace Assessment Tool, developed by Public Health Alliance for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Two-Spirit, Intersex, Queer, and Questioning Equity. Educational workshops offered by OUTSaskatoon are described at the end of the document. These workshops provide an opportunity to learn and implement changes as an organization. This guide should be a living document, and resources should be updated periodically as understandings of LGBTQ2S+ needs evolve and services in the city change.

As organizations work toward creating safer spaces for LGBTQ2S+ individuals, it’s important to remember that there is no “safe space,” only “safer spaces” or “safe enough spaces” (LGBTQ2S Toolkit 2019). No space is free from racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia, but there can be spaces that actively work to confront these harmful ideas (LGBTQ2S Toolkit 2019). There is not a dichotomous "safe or unsafe" classification of spaces, but degrees of safety (LGBTQ2S Toolkit 2019). This document should provide you with continuous opportunities to work toward increasing the level of safety experienced by your visitors, volunteers, and staff.

A Note on Social Context

It is essential to recognize that the context of newcomer settlement support services in Canada reflect a cis-normative and hetero-normative social context that requires active confrontation (Ghabrial 2017). It is also important to recognize that LGBTQ2S+ spaces in Canada can be exclusionary (Ghabrial 2017). Confronting the cultural belief in the supremacy of Canadian understandings of gender and sexual diversity is vital to positive spaces for newcomers (Ghabrial 2017).

¹ This document uses the acronym ‘LGBTQ2S+’ to represent gender- and sexually-diverse groups, which include, but are not limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer, Two-Spirit, questioning, intersex, pansexual, asexual, non-binary, and polyamorous people. This ‘umbrella term,’ used commonly in activism and human rights discourse, is not all-encompassing, nor is it exclusive to other identities (ASMMA 2014). ‘Queer’ or ‘sexual and gender minorities’ are other terms commonly used. Variations on the LGBTQ2S+ acronym included in other works in this document include ‘LGBT’ and ‘LGBT+.’ Language regarding sexual and gender diversity is evolving and complex. Though this term is currently appropriate in this work, it may not remain appropriate in other social contexts or as the document ages.

2 Assessment

The first step in understanding how you can make a space more positive for LGBTQ2S+ people is assessing your personal beliefs and practices. Assessment of the design, policies and practices in your workplace or shared space is next. The following assessment tool can be used by individuals and organizations who wish to identify areas for improvement in creating LGBTQ2S+ positive spaces.

The LGBTQ2S+ Assessment Tool was designed by the Public Health Alliance for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Two-Spirit, Intersex, Queer, and Questioning Equity, and included in the OPHA Positive Space Manual, “A Positive Space is a Healthy Space” (OCASI Positive Spaces Initiative 2019).

2.1 Personal Assessment Tool

Options are yes (Y), no (N), in progress (IP) or not sure (NS).

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|----|----|
| I have an equal rights statement posted in my work area (a positive space sticker, for example). | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I keep a list of resources for people who are LGBTQ2S+ and accessing my services. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I am honest about the limits of my understanding of gender diversity and sexual orientation. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I try to use inclusive language like “partner” instead of “girlfriend/boyfriend” or “wife/husband.” | Y | N | IP | NS |
| When providing individual or group services, I use questions and comments that are inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I treat people of all sexual orientations and gender identities as individuals with many roles and identities. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I ask questions to understand the personal lived realities of others. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I review our forms, online materials, and posters regularly for inclusivity and appropriate language. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I post positive images and posters of gender and sexually diverse people | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I am comfortable working with co-workers of all orientations and gender identities. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I would feel comfortable if my manager were LGBTQ2S+ | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I understand how homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and monosexism relate to other oppressions such as racism and sexism. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I monitor my attitudes, values, behaviours, and practice for discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I examine my own beliefs for heterosexism. | Y | N | IP | NS |

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|----|----|
| I recognize that a person’s appearance, actions, or words may not be reflective of that person’s sexual orientation or gender identity. I avoid making assumptions based on these characteristics. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I understand that people may engage in sexual activity that is not consistent with their sexual identity. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I monitor my values and language for generalizations regarding sexual orientation and sexual identity. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I am aware of the laws and personnel policies concerning sexual orientation and gender diversity. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I am aware that the presenting problems of an LGBTQ2S+ person may not be related to gender or sexuality. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I use an anti-oppression framework in my practice. I acknowledge the privilege that society bestows on some groups. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I advocate for policies that include non-discrimination related to sexual orientation minorities and gender diverse persons. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I encourage education about sexual orientation and gender identity in my workplace. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I want to safeguard the rights of gender and sexually diverse minorities. | Y | N | IP | NS |
| I confront statements or jokes that discriminate or make fun of LGBTQ2S+ people. | Y | N | IP | NS |

2.2 Workplace Assessment Tool

Please visit <http://assess.positivespaces.ca> to create an online profile and access a survey that allows you to reflect on policies, implementation, and services to create positive space for LGBTQ2S+ people as a newcomer-serving organization.

3. Cultural Competency and Support Training in the Workplace

In attaining a safer space for LGBTQ2S+ newcomers, consider each of the following areas (OCASI Positive Space Initiative 2019a):

1. Mission and Vision
2. Values
3. Strategy (and its focus)
4. Communication and discussion
5. Training
6. Policies
7. Procedures
8. Hiring practices
9. Performance reviews and other forms of accountability

3.1 Step-By-Step Strategy

Create an action plan for each area, wherein there are goals aligned with specific actions and steps, alongside a person responsible for carrying out the task by a deadline (OCASI Positive Space Initiative 2019a). Integrating sexual and gender diversity resources into services for all visitors will create a space where LGBTQ2S+ people, who may not feel safe disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity, will still have access resources (AMSSA 2014). Demonstrating comfortability and allyship in your interactions with all service users can create trust between your staff and LGBTQ2S+ people (AMSSA 2014).

As you and your organization work through the above assessments and reference the following resources, it may be necessary to seek support from LGBTQ2S+ organizations, such as OUTSaskatoon, in developing cultural competency, writing appropriate policy, and implementing active allyship practice in daily operations.

4 Positive Space Environmental Design (adapted from OCASI Positive Spaces Initiative, 2019)

The below strategy may be used as guiding design principles for creating an LGBTQ2S+ positive space in your organization.

4.1 Key Components

1. Signage & Infrastructure

Posters, rainbow flags, and positive space markers are ways to let clients know that the personnel at the organization are committed to providing safe and affirming services to LGBTQ2S+ newcomers. It is important to note that these should **only** be presented by staff who are trained in LGBTQ2S+ cultural competency and are prepared with resources to assist LGBTQ2S+ newcomers. Examples of positive signage and infrastructure are:

- Images with diverse representations (many cultures, genders, sexualities, languages, ages, ethnicities, religions, etc.)
- Aim for culturally relevant and culturally sensitive materials
 - Research, consultation, and gathering input may be necessary
- Clear positive affirming statements displayed within the workspace.
 - “You are welcome here.”
 - “This space strives to be safe, welcoming, and inclusive for people of all genders and all sexualities.”
- Accessible and clearly-marked gender-neutral bathroom with all amenities (including baby change table)
- “Ally” stickers or posters for workers to display in their workspaces after completing allyship training, with an understanding that active allyship is a continual commitment.

2. Policies & Procedures:

Human rights policy should be integrated within the organization to explicitly include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression as protected grounds, as legally required in Canada. Ways to fortify this policy with concrete guidelines and procedures include:

- Procedure for addressing homo/bi/transphobia, harassment, and bullying
- Client Bill of Rights
- Behavioural expectations in the space
- Feedback and complaints procedure

3. Resources:

LGBTQ2S+ resources should be in the same area as all other resources. These can include:

- “Know Your Rights” information specific to Canadian human rights law
- LGBTQ2S+ immigration, immigrating as a same-sex couple/family, sponsoring a same-sex partner, filing a refugee claim based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and HIV status. Contact information for local LGBTQ2S+-friendly lawyers who are skilled and reputable in these areas could also be useful.
- Information on changing name and sex designation on legal documents
- LGBTQ2S+ newcomer-friendly health care providers and clinics
- Information on languages of service or translation services
- Include health care providers equipped and knowledgeable to serve trans clients
- Include LGBTQ2S+ newcomer-friendly counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and addictions counsellors.

LGBTQ2S+ community organizations; LGBTQ2S+ newcomer support groups; LGBTQ2S+ parenting and family programming; etc

4.2 Key Considerations

1. Universal

The same information should be communicated to everyone who uses the space. A person should not have to come out, or be outed, or be perceived as LGBTQ2S+ in order to receive LGBTQ2S+ relevant information. Universal provisioning of resources ensures that everyone understands the office is a positive space. It implicitly states that "this is something we talk about and offer services about, and these are the expectations here."

2. Accessible Communication – Across languages, literacy levels, and abilities.

Language

- Communicating information in whatever language(s) a person can understand is important.
- Consider challenges of translation
- Some languages do not have words for LGBTQ2S+ identities or do not have words with positive connotations
- Many cultures have unique understandings and contexts of LGBTQ2S+ identities, and these may not match up with Western LGBTQ2S+ definitions

Format

- Visual/pictorial, written, Braille, verbal, etc.
- With necessary aids and accommodations

Timing

- Communicate information upon initial intake/hiring, regularly and as needed after that
- Should be an ongoing conversation
- Discuss at staff meetings and hold regular training sessions
- Remind clients of policies as relevant – try to do this to prevent incidents rather than only after the incidents have occurred

Inclusive

- Use gender-neutral words like “partner” instead of boyfriend/husband or girlfriend/wife
- Intake forms: Sex/gender questions
 - Which are you asking for, sex or gender identity?
 - Is it actually necessary to know?
 - The best option is to put a blank line and let people fill it in themselves. No number of checkboxes can cover every option. Avoid using the word ‘Other.’
 - Include a ‘Prefer Not to Disclose’ option.
 - Ask for preferred names, titles, and pronouns.

Anonymity & Confidentiality

- What are the policies?
- How are these communicated?
- How are people held accountable to them?
- How are these maintained when translators/interpreters are involved?
- This consideration includes both language and (dis)ability support
- Be aware that many LGBTQ2S+ newcomers may not be comfortable with a translator from the same background, for fear of judgment or being ‘found out.’
- Consider what procedure to use if a person needs assistance in communicating or recording what is intended to be anonymous feedback

Accountability

- How are incidents addressed?
- How are injured parties supported in healing, safety, and access to justice?
- How are offending parties supported in learning and growing?
- How are similar incidents prevented from happening again?
- Who is responsible?

5 Educational Opportunities

Consider hosting regular presentations and workshops to facilitate exposure and exploration of gender and sexual diversity among staff and others who frequent your spaces. OUTSaskatoon provides a variety of training opportunities and workshops available to businesses, non-profits, professionals, and others.

5.1 OUTSaskatoon Workshops

For non-profit organizations

- Professional development training (minimum 2 hours)
- Custom education services and on-going training
- Consultation on best practices, policy and procedure development, and client/customer support

Cultural sensitivity workshop

- LGBTQ2S+ terminology
- Two Spirit history in North America
- A background on societal oppression throughout history, including racism, homophobia, and transphobia
- The modern Two Spirit movement

Other presentations and training

- Body Positivity ft. Gender Diversity Workshop
- How to Be a Queer + Trans Ally

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Any comments, questions, or criticisms of the content of this document are welcome and can be directed to info@trulyalivefoundation.org