

Family Voice Bulletin – Issue 14 (March 30th/2021), Gender Diversity

Summarized by KJ (Krystal-Jyl) Thomas, MSW, RSW

Social workers KJ Thomas and Tracey Kent facilitated with guest presenter, Nathan Strayed, MSW, RSW, from Trailhead Counselling. Nathan gave a presentation on Gender Diversity and Inclusion.

Within the last while we have really begun to see changes in acceptance and understanding of self-identity, and relationships with others. We want our Family Groups to be supportive safe spaces for all, and believes in supporting LGBTQIA2S+ communities. To begin, let's have a look at the acronym LGBTQIA2S+ and what it means: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and Two-Spirit. The plus is to incorporate and acknowledge that our identities, and terms evolve and change. Some people shorten this to LGBT, but it remains important to be aware and acknowledge all the variations of beauty our minds and bodies come in. Another term you might hear is Queer. Where it once was used in a derogatory manor, for some folks, Queer has become a reclaimed word. Queer can be an umbrella term for minorities in the LGBTQIA2S+ community. Another term relatively new in mainstream language is cisgender. This refers to a person who identifies with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth. Lastly, appropriate pronoun use has become recognized and encouraged. This means referring to the person in the pronouns they identify with. For some, he or she, does not pair appropriately with their identity, and in these cases, some may opt to use the pronouns they, or them or many others.

A common point of misunderstanding can be the differences between sex, and gender. A helpful resource for this is the Genderbread Person v4.0. The full explanation can be found at <https://www.genderbread.org/>. Sex generally refers to the anatomical genitals we are born with, and not all people are born with “one or the other”. Did you know that just as common as it is to be born with red hair, so are the births of intersex people? Gender can be described as the identity, and expression of a person. One of the main things to remember is sex does not equal gender, nor does gender expression. These are all moving parts and can present in a wide continuum. Our focus is on presenting our bodies in a way we are comfortable, and respecting the choices of others to do the same. With all these variables to consider, one might wonder how we are to know the appropriate way to address someone- and the answer is, we ask. At times, we may mistakenly identify or assume- but in all of these cases, having respectful dialogue with the person is the right step to take. We are beginning to move away from the days of pink for girls, and blue for boys- in fact, it was not that long ago in history that even this standard was reversed. While shifts in societal thinking can be confusing, we create the standards of acceptance, and therefore we have the power to change these standards to ensure inclusive communities.

Families can help by creating not only non-judgmental- but also welcoming space for their loved ones. Often times, people within the LGBTQIA2S+ community experience higher rates of mental health issues. This is linked to the added stigma that is faced daily, and a health care system that is not yet fully inclusive. Even when we do not understand, being open to hearing, learning, and continuing to support our loved ones will help create harmony in the home. There are also great resources to reach out to, to help support the journey of growth.

Resources

- Centretown Community Health Centre LGBT2SQ+ Walk-in Counselling Clinic on Wednesdays.
Email: lgbtq2sqwednesday@centretownchc.org
- Trans LifeLine 24 Hr Crisis Line: 1-877-330-6366
- LGBT YouthLine is a youth-led organization offering peer support and leadership opportunities to 2SLGBTQ youth across Ontario: <https://www.youthline.ca/>
- LGBT Wellbeing Check-in Program provides a telephone assurance program for LGBT adults with disabilities (18+) and older adults (55+). To access the program, contact Good Companions at 613-236-0428 or info@thegoodcompanions.ca
- One Ottawa-based organization committed to accessible resources, events, and educational programming to people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions is: <https://kindspace.ca/>
- LGBTTQ+ Around the Rainbow is a community-based program that provides a full range of education, counselling and support services offered by Family Services Ottawa. They support the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit, queer and questioning (LGBTTQ+) communities and allies of Ottawa: <https://familyservicesottawa.org/children-youth-and-families/around-the-rainbow/>