

Beyond Positive Intentions

SEEKING WELL-BEING AND EQUITY FOR LGBTQ+ NEWCOMER WOMEN AND OTHER TRANS AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING NEWCOMERS

Systemic Barriers

Injustice in the refugee claim process

Claims processing is very slow and the timelines are constantly in flux. While waiting, asylum-seekers are restricted from formal employment and accessing many services, and they face logistical and emotional turmoil.

Economic deprivation/insecurity

Most focus group participants experienced financial uncertainty and hardship, and have often having left their home countries quickly, without having prearranged their finances or employment. LGBTQ+ newcomers often lack the personal and professional connections needed to access employment opportunities. Participants noted additional barriers such as *indecent work*, non recognition of foreign credentials and experience, and lack of affordable childcare (many LGBTQ+ newcomers come as single parents).

Negative health & compromised access to healthcare

Refugee claimants and other newcomers do not receive all of the health services available to Canadian citizens, such as OHIP. Undocumented immigrants lack health coverage and fear being reported to immigration services when accessing services. Trans populations are medically underserved, and often face discrimination and refusal of care.

Service Barriers

Embedded assumptions about the 'typical' client

Services that cater to a particular aspect of an LGBTQ+ newcomer's identity tend to be inadequate for all of their needs, e.g. settlement agencies often facilitate connections between clients and communities of similar linguistic/ethnic backgrounds, without considering the safety of queer newcomers in those spaces.

Staff apathy & neglect

Our research did not uncover explicit bigotry by staff of social service organizations, but we did hear of neglect, apathy, ignorance, and nonresponsiveness, such as lack of intervention during experiences of harassment from other shelter users, or mis-gendering.

Failure to advocate against injustice

Even when staff are fulfilling their job responsibilities thoughtfully, they may still fail to anticipate the diversity of their clients' needs, e.g. an agency failing to explicitly state that they do not communicate with immigration officials, while collecting personal/demographic information.

Insufficient & inadequate shelter services

All focus group participants who entered the country as asylum-seekers had lived in a shelter, and faced multiple challenges linked to overcrowded, unsafe and gender-specific shelter spaces with protocols that limited gender actualization (e.g. ban on razors). Shelter residents did not receive support from staff with regard to their immigration needs.

Unaffordable housing & housing discrimination

Housing affordability is a major problem in Toronto, particularly for those marginalized by immigration status, gender, race, and sexuality. Some participants chose homelessness in order to live in close proximity to services available in the downtown core. Participants also recounted experiences of explicit and implicit discrimination from landlords and co-tenants, and of limiting rental norms such as reference letters. This was compounded by a lack of knowledge of tenant rights and rental laws.

Social isolation & exclusion

LGBTQ+ newcomers lack the social connections important for holistic well-being, as well as for material, emotional, logistical, social, and psychological sustenance - including access to systems navigation support, testimonials for housing/work/refugee applications, transportation, the opportunity to collectively commiserate over shared struggle, and, of course, the joys of connecting.

Failure to recognize client strength

It was clearly demonstrated through this research that LGBTQ+ newcomer women and other trans and gender non-conforming newcomers are not "needy", rather they manage to survive, and often thrive, in a world organized to exclude them. Service providers described how they engaged in informal organizing and confronted challenges with resourcefulness, resilience and independence.

Austerity & the diminishment of the social safety net

Every service provider interviewed for this project noted that they were not sufficiently resourced to serve all of those who need them. Government funding has been reduced and is also increasingly subject to strict qualification requirements, or shorter-term grants impacting the continuity of programming and staffing.

Solutions and Recommendations



At the government level

- Actualize economic justice
- Restore the social safety net
- Actualize migrant justice



At the service level

- Reframe accountability
- Diversify staff and challenge employment discrimination
- Invest in decent work
- Structurally integrate client perspectives
- Unpack assumptions and undo service barriers
- Expand (unofficial) service
- Prioritize the systematically under-served
- Explicitly indicate allyship and safety:
- Enable self-organized programming and exclusive space
- Engage in advocacy work
- Practice humility



This infographic is based on the findings from a community-based research project led by Access Alliance, which explored the barriers to health and well-being experienced by LGBTQ+ newcomer women and other trans and gender non-conforming newcomers in Toronto. Learn more about this project by visiting: accessalliance.ca/research-blog/building-positive-spaces-for-newcomer-lgbtq-women