



FIERTÉ TIMMINS PRIDE

# PRISM OF OPPORTUNITIES

A NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR 2SLGBTQ+ SUPPORT  
WITHIN THE COCHRANE & TEMISKAMING  
DISTRICTS OF NORTHEASTERN ONTARIO

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FEBRUARY 2022 // PREPARED BY ATZ EQUITY CONSULTING

FRONT COVER ART: "WHAT LIES BENEATH" BY LOU HOUDE

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# OUR GRATITUDE

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ATZ Equity Consulting acknowledges that we are non-Indigenous settlers on Turtle Island - land that has been inhabited by Indigenous peoples from the beginning. We are grateful for the opportunity to complete this important project within the Cochrane & Temiskaming Districts of Northeastern Ontario, the traditional territory of Ojibway, Oji-Cree, Mushkegowuk (Cree) of the Treaty 9 region. We thank all the generations of first peoples who have taken care of this land for thousands of years. We are Treaty people.

We know that understandings of gender and sexuality have been affected by hundreds of years of colonization of the Treaty 9 area, with great impact to the Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ identifying peoples, and their families.

We acknowledge that we have benefited from the continued exploitation and exclusion of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people of Turtle Island and the Inuit Nunangat. We are mindful of broken promises, marginalization of Indigenous people, and missing and murdered indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. We are committed to treaties, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, and to holding ourselves accountable to decolonizing the work we do at ATZ Equity Consulting.

On behalf of the project team, I would like to express our deep appreciation to the 2SLGBTQ+ people in the region who shared their experiences, stories, perspectives, and ideas. Thank you for bravely sharing your voices and for your contributions to the needs assessment. It is our hope that the shared insights of your lived experiences will help inform a path forward.

We offer our gratitude to the Fierté Timmins Pride Board and Needs Assessment Steering Committee for seeing the need in your community, securing the funding, and championing this important project. You have shown tireless commitment and passion in advocating for the needs of the 2SLGBTQ+ community in the region, and initiating this project is a testament to your dedication.

Lastly, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the amazing project team and consultants. Together, we are a collective of people whom all believe so strongly in the importance of this project.

With much thanks and gratitude,



Alison Rodgers (she/her)  
Project Lead, Co-Founder and Consultant at  
ATZ Equity Consulting

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There is so much to who I am,  
My story is a long, interesting book.  
So, please don't judge me by my cover,  
Thinking you understand me with one look.  
There are times life is so scary,  
It can make you want to run away and hide.  
But, here, I have a community,  
Where I am not ashamed by who I am inside.  
When I hear Canada's anthem,  
There is a line I feel applies to me.  
I take my own special meaning of:  
"The True North strong and free!"  
My hometown is in the True North,  
And it is becoming a very accepting place.  
I see people living harmoniously,  
Whatever religion, gender, creed or race.  
I can be true to myself, and love who I wish,  
Without being made to feel I am "wrong"  
That, I feel, is the best part  
of the True North, free and strong.  
I have experienced set-backs,  
but those are just chances for one to grow.  
I owe a lot of who I am as a person,  
To living in North Ontario.

- Anonymous

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Our sincere thanks to all the talented artists who submitted artwork, poetry, and photography expressing the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ people in the region for use in this report. We wanted the report to be a beautiful reflection of the community members who provided their data to this assessment.

## 2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

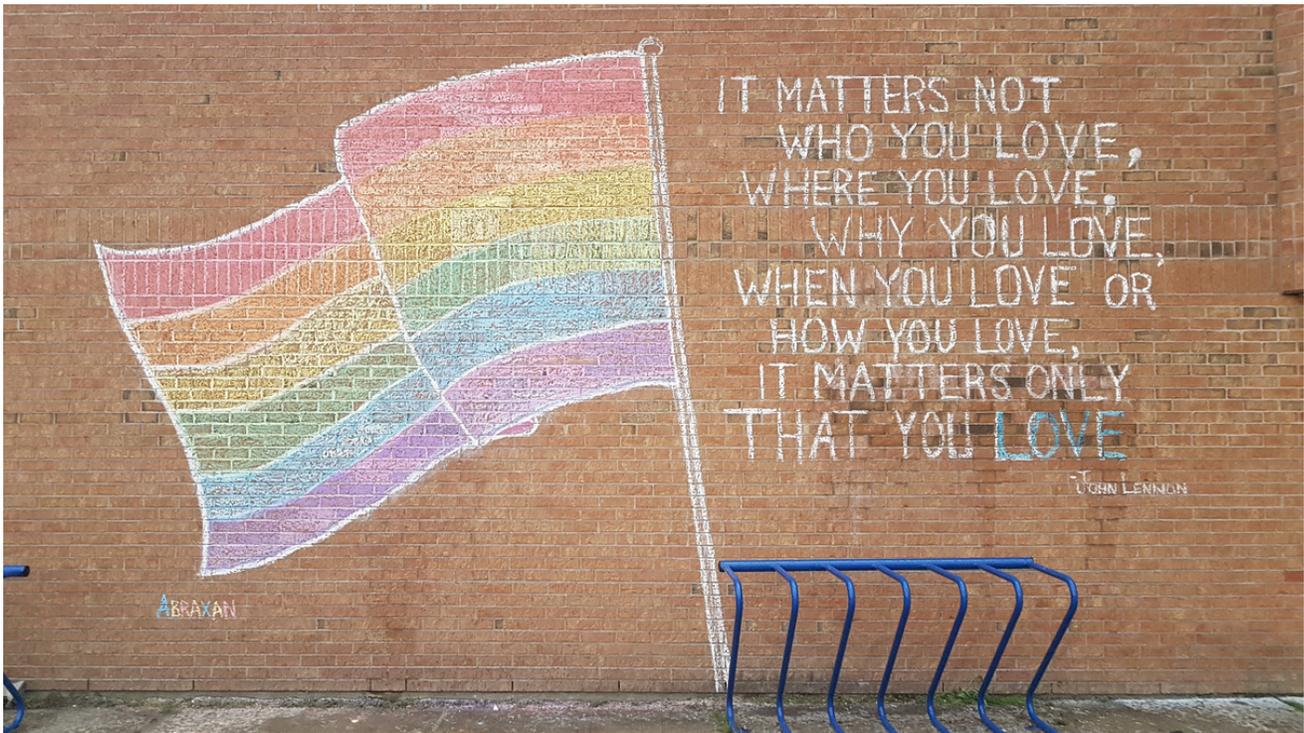
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Fierté Timmins Pride (FTP), the only visible 2SLGBTQ+ presence within the Cochrane & Temiskaming Districts of Northeastern Ontario (the region), is a volunteer Board created to organize and support Pride events for the area. Since their founding in 2014, FTP has been called upon by community partners to provide training, services, and crisis support. As this is beyond the governance scope of Fierté Timmins Pride Board, they secured funding through Women and Gender Equality Canada to conduct this needs assessment that determines key gaps in services to the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

The findings from this needs assessment, which includes the results of online surveys, focus groups, and key informant interviews, help us better understand the lived realities of 2SLGBTQ+ people living in the region. The report identifies three overarching themes that emerged from the data: connecting community, gaps in affirming service provision, and a safe(r) space. These themes reverberated throughout the various data collection methods and were substantiated in existing research and literature. The needs assessment made it very clear that multidisciplinary services are desperately needed, services that support and affirm the 2SLGBTQ+ community and their intersecting identities.

The results of this needs assessment and our findings can be used to support the development of services to better meet the intersectional needs of 2SLGBTQ+ people in the region. We hope this report is the foundation for much-needed safe, affirming, supportive and inclusive service provision in the region.

\* For this needs assessment, the researchers are adopting the acronym 2SLGBTQ+ as used by the Fierté Timmins Pride Board of Directors to represent the diverse gender and sexual identities of Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, asexual/aromantic, agender, intersex, pansexual, and questioning.



Mural at Marathon High School by Abraxan

## 3.0 NEEDS ASSESSMENT DESIGN

### 3.1 COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

The Cochrane & Temiskaming Districts of Northeastern Ontario are located in the Treaty 9 territory and the Robinson-Huron Treaty territory which has a reported population of 109,387 according to the 2021 census. For the purpose of this Needs Assessment, this area which is defined as the Cochrane & Temiskaming Districts of Northeastern Ontario, will be referred to as 'the region' throughout the remainder of this document.

The region includes the City of Timmins, as well as the communities of Cochrane, Matheson, Iroquois Falls, Kapuskasing, Hearst, Kirkland Lake, Temiskaming Shores and traverses up the James Bay Coast. The City of Timmins which is the fourth-largest city in the Northeastern Ontario region serves as a regional centre. The cities of Toronto, Ottawa and Thunder Bay are all an average about 700 km distance from this region.

According to census data, the region is populated with approximately 89% non-Indigenous settlers (including 2% racialized settlers), and 11% First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples. The region has a large Francophone community, with more than 50% of the population being bilingual in French and English.

This region's economy is based on natural resource extraction and is supported by industries related to forestry, the mining of gold, zinc, copper, nickel and silver and agriculture in addition to government, education, social services, and healthcare.

There are four school boards in the Northeastern region, a public English, a public French, a Catholic-English and a Catholic-French, supporting approximately 6,600 students. In addition, there are three postsecondary institutions with several campuses throughout the region.

### 3.2 NEEDS ASSESSMENT BACKGROUND

Fierté Timmins Pride began in September 2014 with a small group of local organizers and three months of planning time. With over 300 people in attendance in the first Pride event in the region, it was an outstanding success for a small community. Fierté Timmins Pride has grown over the past seven years, with a committee that has grown to a volunteer Board of Directors and is a registered not-for-profit organizations. In 2020, the Board of Directors, in response to a community call for more

2SLGBTQ+ services in the region, were successful in receiving funding to explore the capacity and needs of the region through federal funding.

Fierté Timmins Pride with funding from the Department of Women and Gender Equality Canada, hired ATZ Equity Consulting in Spring 2021 to develop an asset-based needs assessment for 2SLGBTQ+ community members and social service organizations in the region. The purpose of the needs assessment was to consult with community members and service providers of the region through online data collection, conduct a comprehensive online surveys with members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community in the region (due to COVID-19 restrictions), offer key informant interviews and focus groups, and summarize the data through community-based, ethical research standards, through an intersectional and trauma-informed framework to identify gaps and provide recommendations to better address the needs of the local 2SLGBTQ+ community.

ATZ Equity Consulting also provided the Fierté Timmins Pride Board of Directors with policy development, training associated with Board Governance related to anti-oppressive/anti-racist, non-profit work, and reflective facilitation of 2SLGBTQ+ experiences in rural Pride movements. Following this needs assessment, ATZ Equity Consulting will provide additional recommendations to the Steering Committee of the Fierté Timmins Pride Board of Directors through a next steps process to offer further feedback for the larger-scale development plan and case for support.

### 3.3 METHODOLOGY

ATZ Equity Consulting used a participatory action, qualitative research approach to engage participants in community-led research. Following a review of the literature and best practices in recruiting and surveying 2SLGBTQ+ people, the research team developed two separate surveys, in both English and French, one for members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community and the second for service providers. All materials were reviewed and vetted by the Fierté Timmins Pride Steering Committee and their Project Coordinator prior to public launch.

The research team offered key informant interviews and four focus groups over Zoom video conferencing due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The needs assessment research was launched immediately prior to Fierté Timmins Pride in June 2021 and included a focus group during Pride Week. The project team attended all Pride events, hosted remotely due to the pandemic, to introduce the project and the project team to the community.

ATZ Equity Consulting promoted the needs assessment details at Pride events, through media releases emailed to local journalists and media outlets, on the Fierté Timmins Pride website and on social media, that may include followers who lived or live in the region. Interested participants were encouraged to complete the survey online or participate in focus groups offered in June and September 2021. The press release issued to launch the needs assessment garnered a lot of media coverage in multiple publications including

Timmins Daily Press, TimminsToday.com, CTV News Northern Ontario, and The Toronto Star. Transcriptions of interviews were made available to the researchers through transcription software Otter AI. The research team coded all transcriptions, survey data, and supporting literature for themes.

ATZ Equity Consulting collected all data from the needs assessment and stored it in a secure location. This needs assessment provides a summary of the anonymized data analysis to keep confidential the identities of participants.

## 3.4 DEMOGRAPHICS OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT PARTICIPANTS

A needs assessment helps alert community organizations to what's working and not working for people in a community. It helps to identify gaps and opportunities so the needs of people who might be experiencing barriers can be understood and advocated for. Fierté Timmins Pride consulted with ATZ Equity Consulting to ensure all voices are heard from the 2SLGBTQ+ community in the region through a consent-based, anonymous assessment process.

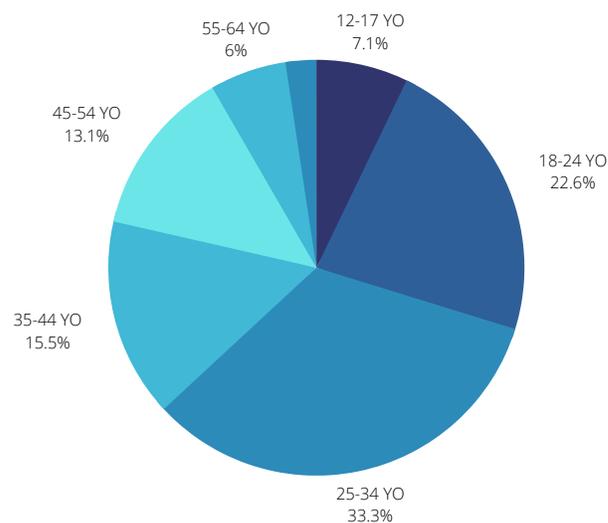
Through a 2SLGBTQ+ community member online survey, a service provider survey, key informant interviews and focus groups, as well as a review of other reports and data applicable to the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ people in the area, as well as Ontario

outside of large city centres, ATZ Equity Consulting explored the feedback and themes that arose from the views of the participants.

### 3.4.1. 2SLGBTQ+ COMMUNITY MEMBERS

For the online survey, open for four weeks, 84 2SLGBTQ+ community members participated through either the English or French language survey. Of the participants living, or having lived, in the region, 72% live in the City of Timmins, with the remaining living in smaller communities regionally. The majority of the participants had lived in the area for 10 years or longer (76%) and 19% had lived in the region between one and nine years. Approximately 50% had also lived in Southern Ontario, but 43% had only lived in other regions of the North East.

The survey welcomed a diversity of voices from different age groups from youth to older adults:



YO = years old

For this survey, 2SLGBTQ+ participants indicated that 100% spoke English, 61% spoke French, 2% spoke an Indigenous language, and 10% spoke another language.

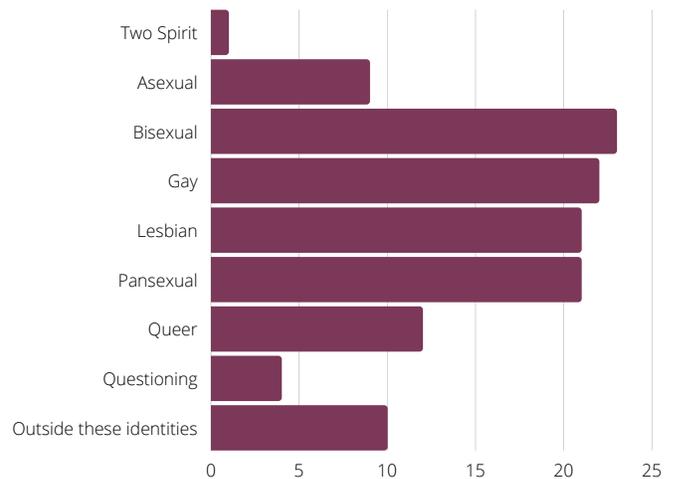
Gender identity and expression is a protected human right under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as well as by the Ontario Human Rights Code. Gender identity is a person's internal sense of self, within a spectrum of masculinity and femininity, and it is not always in alignment with the sex someone was assigned at birth. Gender expression is the way in which someone chooses to share their gender socially. This includes the way a person walks, talks or dresses, and can change over time. A person may not be able to express their gender to match their gender identity for a variety of reasons including safety, access to gender affirming clothes or services, biology, and lack of autonomy.

While there are some who use the term Two-Spirit to refer broadly to all queer Indigenous people, the term is more commonly used for First Nations identities that originate in traditional understandings of gender and sexuality, rather than Western colonial binaries. Because these traditions and understandings are culturally and spiritually specific, it's important to recognize that Two-Spiritness is not an identity universal to all Indigenous communities or something that is a part of all Indigenous worldviews.

In the survey of 2SLGBTQ+ community members, 55% of participants identified as female; 24% identified as male; 23% identified as within the

trans, non binary and gender fluid/queer spectrum; 2% identified as Two Spirit, and many identified as more than one gender identity, or none at all.

Sexual identity is how a person identifies themselves in terms of their sexual or romantic attractions. This is independent of gender, although gender can be a barrier to a person's sexual identity being accepted. There are many ways a person may identify themselves in their attraction to others; attracted to the same gender (gay or lesbian), attracted to more than one gender (bisexual), attracted regardless of gender (pansexual), not sexually attracted to any gender (asexual), or attracted to the opposite gender (heterosexual), for instance. A person may have a sexual or romantic attraction that aligns with one of these identities, but does not use this term, or any, to describe themselves.



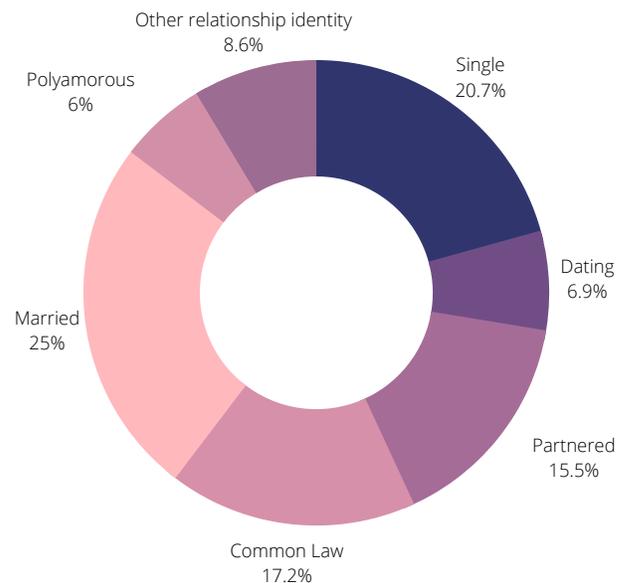
The community members who participated in the survey identified as 2SLGBTQ+ and included sexual identities: 1% Two-Spirit, 9% Asexual, 23% Bisexual, 22% Gay, 21% Lesbian, 21% Pansexual, 12% Queer, 4% Questioning, and 10% identified outside of these identities.

Finally, the community members identified similar to the population demographic of the region: 84% of the participants identified as White, 10% identified as Indigenous, 6% identified as Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latinx, Middle Eastern, or Southeast Asian, while 7% identified as Multiracial, Biracial or an ethnicity not listed.

The researchers also wanted to understand other aspects of the participants' experiences in their community through different ways to identify beyond their gender, sexuality and race. Survey participants also indicated that about two-thirds were employed, and one-third were students—approximately a quarter identified as a parent, or spiritual, or neurodivergent. Although not correlating factors, the 2SLGBTQ+ community identifies in many different and diverse ways that are like many other communities living in Canada. These participants are neighbours, family members, and coworkers.

It is important to note that, like many studies describe, about 50% of the participants have experienced mental health challenges, which may or may not be related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in Canada since March 2020. Twenty-seven percent of those who answered the survey are survivors of sexual violence, 18% are survivors of physical violence, 11% live with a disability, and 8% are currently experiencing poverty. There are many ways people can identify, and this list does not fully represent the many intersections that can create systemic barriers for 2SLGBTQ+ community members.

One aspect of people's lives that is often discussed as part of the 2SLGBTQ+ experience is the opportunity to explore romantic opportunities and dating, and have relationships and families. In this survey, participants expressed a diversity of experiences when asked about their relationship status. For instance, 24% were single, 8% were dating, 18% were partnered, 20% lived common law, 29% were married, 7% were polyamorous, and 10% identified their relationship in another way not listed.



### 3.4.2. SERVICE PROVIDERS

Service providers living and working in the region have critical perspectives to share about the landscape of services for 2SLGBTQ+ folks, including the systemic barriers, current services, and for some the dual role of service provider and community member. Two-thirds of the participants also identify as a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. In this survey we received

responses from 36 English and French language service providers, and requested anonymous feedback based on their experience as a service provider at their organization, and as individuals living and working in the region.

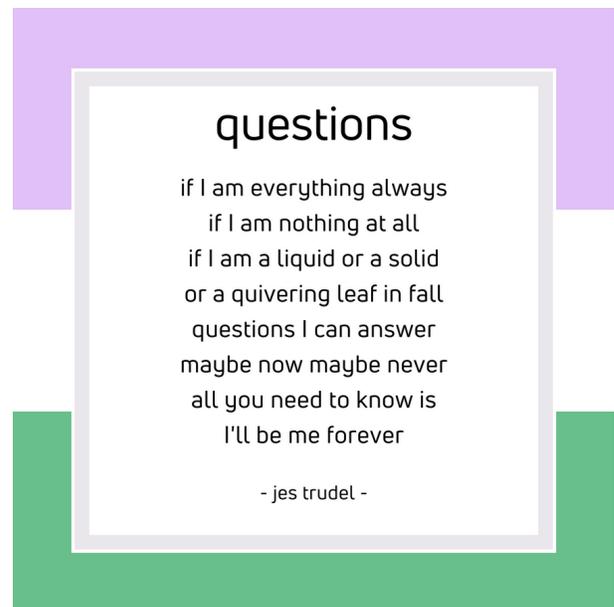
Of the service providers who answered the survey, 81% worked in Timmins, and the others worked in the surrounding communities. Over 50% worked in the area for over a decade, and another 20% worked regional for five to 10 years. The rest had worked from under one year to five years locally.

Interestingly, of the organizational sectors that commonly provide services for 2SLGBTQ+ people, 31% of the participants indicated they were service providers outside of the following list. For the rest of the service providers, 20% worked in the anti-violence sector; 14% in healthcare; 11% in community counselling or child protection; 9% in schools or other social services; 6% in child and family services; 3% law enforcement and corrections, harm reduction, housing, or community legal services.

The majority, 97% of the organizations represented through their service providers, offered English language services, 69% provided French, 3% offered Michif, and 3% provided another language other than English, French or a regional Indigenous language.

### 3.4.3. KEY INFORMANTS AND FOCUS GROUPS

ATZ Equity Consultant recruited the key informants for their perspective, advocacy and activism in the community. The interview researcher asked questions reflective of the community member survey to understand the context of the data presented. All key informants were identified as members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. In addition, the focus groups, run in June and September 2021, invited participants who identified within the community to share their experiences in a deeper, facilitated conversation than the survey would allow. The focus groups also provided a secondary, accessible opportunity for participants to speak to their expertise versus transcribe their experiences. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted over Zoom video conferencing software.



### 3.5 LIMITATIONS

A significant limitation of this needs assessment process is the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which prevented in-person events by Fierté Timmins Pride and, therefore, in-person data collection. To mitigate this limitation, the consultants attended all online events during Pride Week in June 2021 to promote the needs assessment and encourage participation. In addition, focus group and key informant interviews continued to be conducted over Zoom Video Conferencing in September 2021 due to increases in COVID-19 cases with back-to-school processes. While in-person relationship building and snowball recruitment processes for needs assessments in the 2SLGBTQ+ community is an effective strategy, travel and in-person, confidential interviewing was not possible within this timeframe and public health restrictions.

Due to the inability to travel, other limitations existed for in-person networking and training opportunities with community organizations providing 2SLGBTQ+ inclusive services and the Fierté Timmins Pride board. ATZ Equity Consulting addressed these limitations with monthly meetings with the project Steering Committee and outreach through social media, press releases, and Board recommended contacts. In addition, to compare the data collected through the needs assessment, the research team reviewed the literature addressing the 2SLGBTQ+ community in the region, and in Ontario to ensure the reliability of the data and recommendations.

#### Caged

*I am an eagle. Just let me fly free! I am stuck in my cage watching others fly, but I am unable to stretch my wings and leave.*

*I always come back to this cage. This cold, dark cage. The door is open, but I am too scared to leave. This is my home. No matter how cold and dark it gets, I find comfort. I find comfort in knowing I have somewhere to sleep tonight.*

*There are many birds like me, so I do not feel as alone. I still can't fly freely because I don't want to abandon all that I have known. To many people, I am an ugly beast, but to others, I am a beautiful bird. I love my cage, but I hate not being able to be me. One day, I will be able to truly fly free, but for now, I have my cage.*

Poem by Izabelle (Jackson) Jamieson

There is also limited data specific to the unique intersections of race or Indigeneity and the 2SLGBTQ+ community in the area. While there was a small number of survey responses from these populations that provided us with important and meaningful data, we, unfortunately, were not able to attract any participants for the focus group held specifically for Black, Indigenous, and other racialized people. There was some Indigenous representation in other focus groups and key informant interviews.

As the Fierté Timmins Pride Board of Directors is a voluntary group, the consultants worked with the Steering Committee and its Project Coordinator to address limitations in access and connections to key stakeholders, such as 2SLGBTQ+ community members and their families, health care and social service providers, Indigenous service organizations, local First Nations, and other key informants.



Mural at St. John's United Church by Abraxan

## 4.0 OVERARCHING THEMES

### 4.1 CONNECTING COMMUNITY

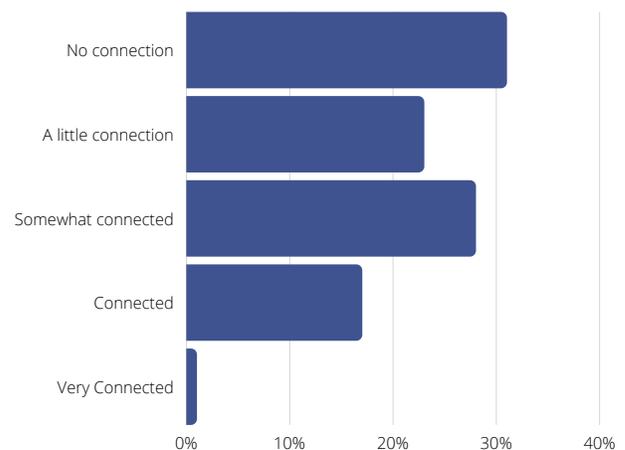
A sense of belonging and connection is integral to human growth and development, and social inclusion is a globally accepted social determinant of health. We thrive through nurturance, inter-relationship, and hope. For children, youth and adults who have diverse gender identities and expression and/or sexual identities, a sense of community is central to mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Colpitts and Gahagan explain in a 2016 study of 2SLGBTQ+ health that “personal coping skills, social support networks, and community connectedness” are essential determinants of wellness. They continue that significant impacts to a sense of connectedness are:

- supportive work and school environments;
- accepting communities, including family homes; and
- welcoming health care spaces.

The 2SLGBTQ+ members of the region responded that their sense of connection is very poor, with 82% citing an experience of no connection to somewhat connected. Service responders participating in the study agreed that in the community where they live throughout the region, only 26% feel that visibility for 2SLGBTQ+ members exists. In fact, they describe an even more significant lack of visibility for places

where service providers work, with only 11% of professionals seeing 2SLGBTQ+ representation in their workplaces.

**Question: Do you feel connected to the 2SLGBTQ+ community in Northeastern Ontario?**



In smaller, more northern and remote geographic areas, barriers to community may include lack of diverse representation and anti-oppression education, technology and service access, which can increase direct experiences of homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, sexism and racism that create harmful social exclusion. In describing what is positive about being 2SLGBTQ+ in the region, 42 participants shared various experiences.

Individual participants relayed several experiences that felt, to them, inclusive and validating, such as: “Pride Week,” “Witnessing a friend form a school-based Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA),” “Northeastern Ontario is

sometimes more progressive and open than rural Southern Ontario," "A great group of friends," and a sense of "acceptance." One participant asked: "what opportunities exist for greater visibility, community creation, and learning opportunities. In particular, I am interested in what community education opportunities are available for such topics as inclusive language and practices."

In contrast to those more positive stories shared, 38% of respondents could only describe experiences of disconnection and isolation. According to a study of creating authentic spaces by Hixson-Vulpe, the significant barriers faced by trans people, for instance, are a lack of acknowledgement, including respect for names and pronouns, which often results in hostility and violence. One participant says, "there's nothing positive about being trans and living in Northeastern Ontario." Participating parents of 2SLGBTQ+ youth in the needs assessment described a lack of connection and a sense of searching in the dark for community and supports for themselves and their child. "When it's your child," says one participant, "you're not going to let anything stop you. It's a human right, but there's no support system here for my child."

When community members live with a sense that there is nothing positive about their experience in the region, there is an opportunity, as one participant says, "to be a torch carrier for every young person," ensuring that "representation matters, especially in northern cities." Although several responses included the experience of "microaggression and homophobia," one participant believes "we have a responsibility to continue to push for acceptance so that other, discovering members

of the alphabet [2SLGBTQ+] never have to live in fear." An example that several participants described caused fear was when large tire marks defaced the rainbow crosswalk in Timmins as an act of aggression against the local 2SLGBTQ+ community. "The community's children were involved with the crosswalk, it was a community thing, and skid marks and the comments were a huge threat. This is for our kids' futures," exclaims one community participant.

**"We're here. We're queer. Please provide us with more safe spaces and social supports."**

Across the globe, the resiliency of 2SLGBTQ+ people builds a sense of connectedness, activism, and solidarity for human rights. For many communities, online connection provides support and idea sharing that helps address barriers more locally. For members living in the region, 50% were connected to an online community and described how they found themselves and their identities best represented through social media. For instance, in a study of the positive impacts of technology on young gay men's dating and sexual relationships in Canada, the authors describe that the "current research demonstrates that gay men use technology in a variety of mental, emotional, social, and relationship-affirming ways." The study describes how the internet plays a vital role in supporting and augmenting access to health- and relationship-affirming information.

Some participants felt connected to social groups and community groups, often through community events and sometimes at school and work. Only a few members thought they

saw themselves represented in regional and local media, local businesses, positions of leadership, or sports. In contrast, 80% of service providers said they had seen public events and social media promotions for 2SLGBTQ+ people in the community.

**“When I see people online who are not in community, like the Facebook groups, I’m protecting us because there is a lot of hate. There are good people and ones who will fight alongside you, and I appreciate that. I have a habit of going into the comments, and my feelings get hurt.”**

The most likely places to meet new 2SLGBTQ+ people in the area were primarily through friends, followed by social media and dating apps, Fierté Timmins Pride, school, social events and community groups. For the Fierté Timmins Pride Board of Directors and sponsoring local businesses and organizations, participants called for events beyond Pride Week because 48% of respondents could not attend the June events. Only 14% had participated every year or multiple times. But, several respondents agreed that “Timmins Pride is awesome.”

Seventy-four participants offered detailed descriptions of the challenges of being 2SLGBTQ+ in the region. Some community members described a struggle to live “out” and an intentional choice to remain closeted or minimize their identity. With a “shallow dating pool,” experiences of “ignorance” and “close-mindedness,” for some, there was a sense of “consistent probability of being a victim of hate throughout childhood, and into adulthood, in most public areas.”

For Two Spirit and other gender and sexually diverse Indigenous members of the community, one respondent says, “how difficult it is for many of us to just carry on.” Intersections of homophobia, transphobia, combined with racism and colonization, create immeasurable trauma. In *A Manual for Decolonization*, McNeil-Seymour says that “LGBTQ social justice initiatives cannot be won on the back of the oppressed ‘others’.” In a study describing the impacts of colonization on Indigenous queer people, the authors explain that the experiences of specific intersections of “personal, state and structural violence experienced by many Two Spirit/LGBTQ Indigenous people living in Canada” are tied to larger historical and social contexts of colonization, including relationship violence.

When family members, neighbours, colleagues, racialized community members, and peers continue to feel “judgement” and “bullying,” respondents believe there is an opportunity for the larger community to gather to ensure social inclusion and dignity through:

- additional community events beyond Pride Week;
- increased “access to health care, housing and targeted mental health supports;” and
- a municipal and regional strategy to welcome more 2SLGBTQ+ people, including students, entrepreneurs, workers, and families, into the area to increase diversity and the growth of a safe and accepting community.

Participants of the needs assessment want residents and visitors to the region to know that “there’s more diversity than meets

the eye” and that the 2SLGBTQ+ community “exists” as and is “proud” to be more than a rainbow. “We have much to contribute and should be considered as equal partners in shaping our community,” says one respondent. Another explains, “The luke-warm support from local institutions and service providers does not reflect the overwhelming support available at the individual, social, and grassroots level.”

**“We are a caring and loving group of people, but some of us still fear repercussions.”**

## 4.2 GAPS IN AFFIRMING SERVICE PROVISION

Social services affirming for 2SLGBTQ+ physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health are well known to increase resiliency and decrease the incidence of suicide in a population, especially for transgender people and Indigenous youth, who are at especially high risk of trauma and harm. Sixty percent of the participants cited no awareness of affirming and inclusive services for 2SLGBTQ+ community members. Few participants in the needs assessment with lived experience highlighted services in a positive light. Several mentioned positive service referrals from Fierté Timmins Pride and its board, which is not a social service organization.

**“Am I someday going to be able to stop explaining myself, or do I have to come out every day from the friggin’ closet? Is there a greener side to this?”**

For those service providers responding to the health and social service needs of the same community, 47% felt that the organization they work for is welcoming and affirming to 2SLGBTQ+ service users. When asked about how they provide welcoming and affirming services, some providers described their support of Pride Week through social media and events, specific affirming materials such as posters and flyers, as well as window displays, and one respondent mentioned specific internal training and committee support. Of the service providers representing local organizations, only 22% indicated their workplace has a specific policy related to providing services for 2SLGBTQ+ service users, 47% said “no,” and 31% said, “I don’t know.” Only 18% of service providers felt they could refer patients or service users to 2SLGBTQ+ specific services in the region, and that they cannot find services to support their service users in larger city centres.

When asked if 2SLGBTQ+ community members were “out” to their healthcare or service provider, 48% said “yes,” 18% said “no,” while 21% clarified that they are out to some of their service providers and not others, and 15% indicated that they did not share all aspects of their gender or sexual identity. Although 50% of respondents indicated they felt comfortable disclosing to their health care provider or other services, 44% had never been asked about their gender or sexual identity by their health care provider. Regarding trans-affirming, accessible and informed services in the region, 81% of participants in the needs assessment did not know of any local transgender services, and 13% could not identify services specifically.

**Question: What statements would you say are accurate when it comes to accessing your health care provider or health services?**

Comfort with disclosing to a provider:

- 50% feel comfortable disclosing
- 19.5% don't feel comfortable disclosing

Comfort with being "out" to a provider:

- 26.8% don't feel it's necessary to be out
- 30.5% feel it's necessary to be out

Other perceptions of provider competency for 2SLGBTQ+ health services:

- 22.6% feel service providers are not informed
- 43.9 % have never been asked about gender or sexual identity
- 7% would only access healthcare in an emergency
- 11.9% feel that accessible healthcare is a dream.

Of 43 participants who offered answers to the request for stories about positive, affirming services from a health care and/or service provider, 50% could provide an example of an affirming experience, but all were varied. Some examples included health care providers who consulted with peers and specialists to ensure quality care; appropriate questions about gender, transition, and pronouns; and communication with same-gender spouses during a medical emergency. There was a clear gap in gender-affirming hormone treatment cited by several participants in the needs assessment. Other respondents discussed incidents of medical and psychological trauma by medical professionals and non-gender and sexuality affirming care, including deadnaming,

misgendering, and asking inappropriate questions about sexual partnerships. Parents of 2SLGBTQ+ youth also had to advocate for affirmative health services and education supports.

**Examples of non-affirming health or service provision:**

- **"This list is never-ending."**
- **"The list is long."**
- **"Every time I see a doctor."**
- **"No one ever asks for my pronouns."**
- **"The assumption that I'm straight."**
- **"They use my dead name (after being told)."**
- **"Not out to any health care provider."**

In a study titled *The Lives of LGBT Older Adults*, the authors warn: "Health and social care services are implicated in the social exclusion and marginalization of LGBTQ older adults through histories of discrimination in which heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia were institutional, and gender expressions and sexualities beyond hetero- and cisnormativity were pathologized." This is echoed by a participant who explains, "I find that a lot of the members of the community, in the North, the ones here longest, are triggered very easily. And I completely understand because they had to fight to keep their space."

Administrative leadership in health care and social services is key in providing affirming and welcoming care for 2SLGBTQ+ service users of all ages through ongoing professional development opportunities; policy and procedures; visual prompts such as posters, brochures and decals; hiring practices; and community engagement. Of the service providers who responded in the needs

assessment, 49% felt that their organizational leadership and management welcomed 2SLGBTQ+ community members. Examples of this leadership included:

- training;
- an inclusion policy;
- programming and activities;
- ensuring LGBTQ+ affirming materials were available for service users;
- seeking external resources for referrals.

Yet, service providers also indicated they witness non-affirming processes and behaviours, including always seeking “advice” from the “only out person on staff,” making assumptions of heterosexuality, denial of human rights and affirming care, denial of affirming messaging, lack of training, and no policy support.

According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission Policy on Preventing Discrimination Because of Gender Identity and Gender Expression, 2SLGBTQ+ people are “protected from discrimination and harassment because of gender identity and gender expression in employment, housing, facilities and services [such as healthcare and education], contracts, and membership in unions, trade or professional associations.”

For 2SLGBTQ+ people accessing publicly funded services, as well as private services, “organizations are liable for any discrimination and harassment that happens.” For service providers in the region who completed the needs assessment, 55% had not received training specific to inclusive services to 2SLGBTQ+ people. Some respondents had accessed training online through their own

initiative, or supported by their organization. Still, several requested additional regular training for all staff and opportunities for community involvement and partnerships. Service providers also called for additional policies specific to services for 2SLGBTQ+ service users or patients.

**“To my knowledge, we have never deliberately excluded anyone from the LGBTQ+ community in our spaces, or have adopted any behaviour or attitudes that would indicate so. However, there is always room for improvement and better ways to reach people.”**

Due to the region’s ongoing barriers to service provision, 2SLGBTQ+ community members indicated that only 14% travel locally to access services, 35% can only access services in a major city, and 30% only access services remotely. For 35% of the participants, they travel 2-3 times a year outside of the region to access those services with an estimated cost of more than \$500 annually for the majority of travellers. One participant reflected: “People don’t understand the North ... they say, ‘North Bay can provide the service.’ North Bay is 4 hours away! North Bay can’t provide proper service to us; it is not even in our region!”

Over the past five years, several necessary studies have explored services for 2SLGBTQ+ people across Canada and Ontario. These include barriers to mental health services, especially for low-income 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, due to lack of service provider training and dominant, biased biomedical frameworks that are discriminatory (Ross, et al.). Another Northern Ontario study identifying the intersections of substance addictions and

2SLGBTQ+ identity reminds health care administrators that “having a safe, open and non-discriminatory space” for 2SLGBTQ+ patients to seek treatment must be combined, for Indigenous people, with cultural or traditional-based programming. Participants in the needs assessment were asked specifically if they could access mental health services that were affirming and inclusive in the region, and 43% believed so. One service provider followed up by saying that many organizations offer services for people of all genders but are not seen as affirming and welcoming to the 2SLGBTQ+ community because they have not engaged in training and resources.

On the other hand, the staff member reflected that no organization is funded explicitly for 2SLGBTQ+ service provision. “We have seen community partners come together and try to do their best, try to offer support, but we all need to access education and provide services within the full realm of our scope of practice.” A community participant agrees, especially regarding well-being supports in the school system: “The community is doing a terrible job on education. Parents of Catholic schools or Public schools need to be teaching fluency about all kinds of families and people, and we need to remove that question mark from people’s faces. The community can’t neglect health class!”

**“As soon as someone has identified as LGBTQ+, I wish that Health Care Providers would have an immediate response and take action like it’s second nature. There needs to be help to facilitate/educate/sensitive HCPs [Health Care Providers] on how to initiate conversation and be ready for each different member of our community (especially the trans[gender] and Two Spirit community).”**

## 4.3 A SAFE(R) SPACE

In the Voices of Value LGBTQ+ Cultural Competency Toolkit developed by Arch in Guelph, Ontario, the authors explain that both individuals and organizations need to “incorporate historical and system-wide analyses” into the understanding of the lives and needs of 2SLGBTQ+ peoples. On a community and personal level, it is everyone’s responsibility to interrupt the layers and intersections of oppression and privilege that bar 2SLGBTQ+ people from full inclusion. There is a role for each citizen to self-reflect on how we create welcoming and affirming spaces in our homes, schools, workplaces, and public spaces. As one participant reflects: “I think it is important to not only have inclusive, affirming service environments in place but also visibly to communicate that commitment to being a safe place.” Another respondent explains, “Understand that hundreds to thousands of individuals are members of the LGBTQ2S+ community in the area, and cannot comfortably be “out,” but would still benefit from access to improved services.”

What then is at risk if we do not consider the safety of 2SLGBTQ+ community members? Historically, as evidenced in other communities around the globe, we have seen increased community violence, hate crimes, and in extreme cases, homicide. For those disproportionately impacted by violence and harassment, especially transgender people, an exponential risk of self harm and suicide is a reality. One participant in the needs assessment feels they are in so much danger that they stated “let us carry self-defence items.”

In two studies of transgender people living in Ontario, Bauer clearly states that interventions to increase social inclusion, access to medical transition and reduce transphobia “have the potential to contribute substantial reductions in the extremely high prevalences of suicide ideation and attempts; within trans populations.” He further says that this culture and systems change requires government intervention and policy shifts at the population level. “There aren’t any services,” explains one respondent, “like literally, almost zilch, especially for trans people here. People suffering from mental health, victims of abuse, if they go to get help, they are faced with a wall.”

**“There are unintended consequences of being in a place that is historically under-serviced. You have to fight yourself to reach out to people and connect with the community; you have real fears.”**

Participants in the needs assessment were asked about their safety experiences in the spaces where they live, work and participate in the community. A respondent requests

“designated safe spaces in even the smallest and most rural communities.” The majority of respondents indicated that they feel primarily safe in their own home but less safe with family. Most feel safe with friends much of the time, but generally feel only moderately safe at work and do not feel very safe at school. One participant says, “There are way too many 2SLGBTQIA people who actively choose the risks of running away with no real plan rather than try to rely on support services or to attempt to receive help from police or hospital services. People should feel safe accessing a hospital or 911, and it’s a problem that they don’t or can’t.”

When needing support for their safety, 44% of the respondents felt safe contacting the local police, while 82% felt comfortable calling EMS (ambulance services) in a medical emergency. In Best Practices in Policing and LGBTQ Communities in Ontario, Kirkup says: “Creating a workplace that values the principles of substantive equality and equity translates into the same values for community relationships.” By building a more active police service, Kirkup continues, the community will benefit from better communication, more confidence in local police services, and an overall increase in public safety.

**“We are normal people too, and our lives do matter! We are not contagious! We are not a threat to society, but society is a threat to us. That needs to change.”**

In their discussion paper on Intimate Partner Violence in Rainbow Communities, The Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children at Western University reinforces that the barriers to services for

2SLGBTQ+ survivors and their abusive partners, as well as recognition and validation that partner violence happens in 2SLGBTQ+ communities. Of 81 respondents to the needs assessment who answered questions about intimate partner, dating or family violence, 48% indicated they felt there were affirming resources and services available to them. A participant asks of local decision-makers: "There needs to be a safe haven to prevent those who are victimized to not be thrown back into a dangerous situation." Another respondent follows up by elaborating that "there needs to be better affordable housing structures, so it is easier for people to leave abusive relationships - romantic, platonic or family."

A recent survey specific to the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ youth in Simcoe County, a largely rural region in Central Southern Ontario, describes that 47% of youth heard homophobic comments daily while 32% heard transphobic and negative gender-related comments daily. With over 50% of Simcoe County youth frequently experiencing verbal harassment about their gender identity, gender expression, or sexual identity, 24% of youth surveyed had thoughts of ending their life, and 33% were struggling with anxiety, depression or self-harm. There are many existing vulnerabilities for 2SLGBTQ+ youth in the region, including lack of safety in school, limited transportation, access to health care and social services, and a lack of affirming community spaces. These issues are preventable and require immediate prioritization of youth well-being throughout the region. One local community participant looks back at their teen years and shares: "in high school, I never said boo. I totally

understand the need to leave and find your greater community. But if more people stay, it could get better."

Simcoe region youth cited a 24% uptake in substance use and 42% experiencing parental and other family acceptance. Ongoing lack of support, integration, or validation of 2SLGBTQ+ youth will lead to young people leaving the region for more affirming communities and create continuing and escalating costs for crisis health care, education, and social services. One service responder says that Fierté Timmins Pride has received requests for training at campuses and for teachers and school boards, but they are volunteer board members for community events and not experts in the field. A parent respondent worries that there will continue to be harm against gender-creative young people without proper training and support. "There's no tolerance for a boy here to have pink mittens."

With the ongoing waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, several participants indicated increased experiences of challenging mental health and a sense of isolation throughout the needs assessment. Egale Canada has been tracking the impacts of COVID-19 on Canada's 2SLGBTQ+ community, and recognizes the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on:

- the financial health of 2SLGBTQ+ households;
- the physical and mental health toll on 2SLGBTQ+ community member's quality of life, especially those living with chronic illness;
- the community's increased uptake of self-quarantine, isolation, social distance and

other personal measures compared to the general population; and

- the worry about the welfare of vulnerable friends and relatives living with chronic health and physical disabilities.

As 2SLGBTQ+ community members across Canada experience more poverty and further exclusion for intersectional identities, such as Indigeneity, racialization, and disability (Kia, et al.), this presents additional challenges to the strength building and resiliency of the region's 2SLGBTQ+ population in COVID-19 recovery planning.

**“There’s a little bit of improvement, but not a lot. We can walk around holding hands, but not always. It feels better than it did 20 years ago. But not for someone who’s trans. Humans are humans.”**

Have we been praying to the wrong  
Heaven. Winter dreams about  
Snow globe  
Balancing on vanishing  
Wand, dreaming eyes  
Are like postcards only read  
By ghosts haunting  
Deserts, wastelands.  
Extreme weather events  
Increase. Scientists measure  
Rate of ice melting on  
The arctic. Last reflection  
Of sun  
Caught in dying eyes  
Of polar bear reaches  
History's shivering mirror  
As it releases collapsing  
Suns of ice. Model  
Based projections of  
Our future climate, who  
Will connect disparate  
Webs by a single thread.

Poem by Barry Coleridge

## 5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

### 5.1 BRIDGING THE BARRIERS TO BETTER RESPONSES FOR 2SLGBTQ+ COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The researchers of this needs assessment requested feedback from participants as to what they hope decision-makers would consider in creating and improving services for 2SLGBTQ+ people in the regions. Respondents clearly articulated a need for commitment from health care, social services, and educational institutions to address:

- mandatory and ongoing training for medical, other health care, education and social service providers, including best practice for intersections of disability and 2SLGBTQ+ identities;
- affirming hormone and surgical medical options locally;
- quality, knowledgeable mental health services;
- transparent complaint processes to report when harm is experienced when accessing services;
- review of service policies and access to training to support developments of policies and processes that reflect best practice care and protect the rights 2SLGBTQ+ service users;
- regional services, including rural, as well as urban;
- regional campaign to promote service access and pathways for support;
- inclusion of Indigenous services and culturally relevant care in partnership with local First Nations and service organizations;
- funding for mental health and addiction services;
- supportive services and programming for 2SLGBTQ+ youth in schools, and in community;
- regional commitment to affirming and accurate language for gender and sexuality affirming care, including pronouns and names;
- low barrier services with no cap on service usage;
- fulsome and welcoming equity in community, including for Indigenous and other racialized peoples;
- 2SLGBTQ+ service space with gender affirming products, as well as programs and services; and
- visually affirming, accessible, and welcoming spaces.

In *Going Beyond Good Intentions: Needs Assessment for Student-Led Health Outreach in Northern Ontario*, the authors explain that the gaps in “local system navigation, mental health and addictions services, and preventative services were identified by participants as contributing to poor health.” For the Northern Ontario needs assessment, it was determined

that these gaps were felt more prominently for “marginalized populations, such as women, youth, seniors, First Nations, and the LGBTQ populations.” The main issue, according to the review, was specific to system navigation: the system lacks coordination and service users lack knowledge of the system.

In *Being Safe, Being Me in Ontario*, the researchers offer a holistic approach: “We need improved and creative outreach strategies and support programs for parents and caregivers to help them develop the knowledge needed to support their trans youth, and help them feel safe at home. Peer support groups for parents and siblings of trans youth are much needed, as well as training for family support workers and therapists to enable them to meet the needs of families of trans youth. Gender-affirming, professionally-facilitated services for parents of trans youth are needed to enable them to promote trans youth mental health, well-being and resilience in the home and beyond.” Rainbow Health Ontario, for instance, provides specific guidelines for gender-affirming primary care with transgender and non-binary patients that are publicly available to all health care and social service organizations to implement.

It is recommended therefore by the research consultants for this needs assessment, that decision-makers in the region collaborate towards a 2SLGBTQ+ affirming service centre that offers health care, social services, service navigation supports (e.g. for housing and shelter), counselling for patients and families, as well as public education services, with outreach programming throughout the region. It is recommended that this centre be

intersectional in its approach, partnering with Indigenous leadership; settlement services; Gender-Based Violence, disability and youth services; and school boards, with inspiration and consultancy from multi-service spaces like the 519 in Toronto, and other health care organizations like the HQ in Toronto and the Shore Centre in Kitchener.

**“We need a centre, it doesn’t need to be a big centre, but a place for kids and adults who need mental and medical help - counselling services, a doctor and a nurse. A place where we would be able to hear, ‘Hey, we are here, and we got you.’”**

## 5.2 BUILDING A COMMUNITY COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING 2SLGBTQ+ COMMUNITY MEMBERS

In *Creating Authentic Spaces*, Hixson-Vulpe explains that affirming and positive spaces ensure that all community members can be their genuine selves. “It takes a lot of energy for people to constantly hide important parts of their lives, which can impact someone’s ability to be fully productive.” Inclusion, the author says, contributes not only to more individual engagement and wellbeing, but a broader social move toward the acceptance of all people. Frankly, investing in wellbeing for all community members will contribute to a healthier and more diverse local economy.

**“LGBTQ+ people don’t only exist in June. We need more community strength, not only during Pride.”**

Participants in the needs assessment also had important recommendations for how the decision-makers can commit to a more welcoming and inclusive region:

- “Have 2SLGBTQ+ people on the boards, committees, councils, and government bodies making these decisions. Not as consultants. As part of the decision-makers and leaders. (Métis Nation of Ontario, Connect Clinic, and CAMH are great examples of this.)”
- “The industries our economies are dependent on are inherently violent and that violence spills over into our communities. Diversify our economy, protect the environment, put Indigenous and marginalized people in power and at the front.”
- “Hospitals and the police. I think at least three quarters of them need to be properly trained.”
- “A Queer space, a social space would be pivotal.”
- “There is so much opportunity to engage the community in nature and the outdoors for healing.”
- “Workplaces where I don’t have to hide my full self.”
- “Inclusive education is more than just a GSA [Gay-Straight Alliance].”
- “We need champions. We need people to invest in the community.”

In 2021, in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, the Canadian government engaged in creating the *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and 2SLGBTQQA+ National Action Plan*. This needs assessment initiative, led by Fierté Timmins Pride, identifies that the region is not addressing the gaps in local system navigation, mental health and addictions services, and preventative services for 2SLGBTQ+ people. This systemic discrimination exists across the country from coast to coast to coast. As the local region begins to recognize the inherent strength and contributions of the 2SLGBTQ+ population to the economy, culture, and well-being of the community, transformational change will occur. Gladys Radek, quoted in the National Action Plan concludes: “All people living in Canada have the responsibility to live in peace and with respect for basic human rights, including safety and justice. It is time for justice, closure, accountability, equality and true reconciliation.”



## 6.0 CONCLUSION

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The goal of the Fierté Timmins Pride needs assessment was to capture the voices of 2SLGBTQ+ community members, and the people who support and serve them, and to describe the barriers and opportunities they believe will better meet their needs for regional service provision. This report sheds light on the current landscape for 2SLGBTQ+ people who live, work, and play within the Cochrane-Temiskaming Districts of Northeastern Ontario (the region). The project team recognizes that there are some promising practices and positive experiences, but overall the data reflects an overwhelming need for safe and affirming services for the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

The data provided by the community throughout this needs assessment reflected incredible insight and brilliant ideas. We heard loud and clear that the 2SLGBTQ+ community needs connection, affirming services, and safe(r) places and spaces in which to live, learn, work and play. The needs assessment made it very clear that multidisciplinary services are desperately needed, services that support and affirm the 2SLGBTQ+ community and their intersecting identities.

ATZ Equity Consulting extends our gratitude to the Fierté Timmins Pride Board of Directors, and most especially, all the participants who shared their voices. We hope that you feel validated and hopeful that the recommendations in this report will bring new opportunities to your community.

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BACK COVER ART: THE ALL POWERFUL DOESN'T WEAR A FACE BY ANONYMOUS

