

Fostering 2SLGBTQ+ Inclusion in Sport and Recreation in Waterloo Region

Evaluation of Spectrum's 2SLGBTQ+ Multi-Sport Drop-In Program

What is the Multi-Sport Program?

The Multi-Sport Drop-In Program is a free, weekly, drop-in sport program for 2SLGBTQ+ adults (18+ years) in Waterloo Region. It began in April 2022, when, in partnership with the City of Kitchener, it operated from the Stanley Park Community Centre. It later operated in Cambridge in partnership with the Kinbridge Community Association. The initial program was not funded and was run by volunteers. Sport Canada funded the program between April 1, 2023, and March 31, 2024, which enabled the program to expand to include Kitchener's Downtown Community Centre. After registering online for the program, participants attend any of the weekly drop-in sessions at any location.

The program is overseen by a Sports Coordinator, who also serves as the primary facilitator. Co-facilitators assist with leading weekly sessions. Guest coaches and instructors lead specific activities, such as combat sports, pickleball, and yoga. Depending on the number of attendees and their interests, various sports and activities are offered each week, often sports requiring different levels of ability and comfort in sports.

This evaluation was completed as part of the Fostering 2SLGBTQ+ Inclusion in Sport and Recreation in Waterloo Region project, which ran between April 1, 2023, and March 31, 2024, funded by Sport Canada.

Michael R. Woodford, Tin D. Vo, Alex Wells, Eric Van Giessen, and Alex Silver (December 2024). Fostering 2SLGBTQ+ Inclusion in Sport and Recreation in Waterloo Region: Evaluation of Spectrum's Rainbow Diversity Training 101. Spectrum: Kitchener, ON.

Program Goals

Increase the accessibility of 2SLGBTQ+ inclusive sports in Waterloo Region.

Enhance participants' physical, mental, social wellbeing, and comfort engaging in team-based sports.

Between April 1, 2023 - March 31, 2024

210 people participated in the program.

Across the three sites, 87 sessions were held.

28 people attended the largest drop-in session, which was held at the Downtown Community Centre.



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Evaluation

The evaluation assessed the program's impacts and identified ways to enhance it. The evaluation consisted of interviews and online surveys¹ with program participants and interviews and a focus group with program facilitators. Participation in the evaluation was voluntary.

Select findings are presented in this brief report. Readers interested in learning more are invited to review the full report available [here](#).

Why Join the Program?

Individuals joined the program for various reasons. In the pre-program survey, questions explored motivations for joining the program.² Respondents indicated their level of agreement to each question on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Across 15 questions, average scores ranged from 2.45 to 4.25, with higher scores reflecting greater endorsement for the statement.

The three items with the highest average score:

- To spend time with other 2SLGBTQ+ people (average score 4.25)
- Because there is no cost associated with participating in the program (average score 4.16)
- Because I believe I can be myself as a 2SLGBTQ+ person in this program (average score 4.15)

¹ Starting Fall 2023, when an individual joined the program, they were invited to complete a pre-program survey. At the end of each block of drop-in sessions, individuals who completed a pre-program survey were invited to complete a post-program survey. All individuals who expressed interest in joining the evaluation were invited to complete the post-program survey administered for the January-March 2024 block, which was the final survey.

² Between 74 and 75 people answered these questions.

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The lowest scores were for these three items:

- Just to be physically active (i.e., it doesn't really matter to me that it is a 2SLGBTQ+ dedicated space) (average score 2.45)
- Because I want to be involved in 2SLGBTQ+ specific activities that don't involve a lot of talking, such as support groups or book clubs (average score 2.87)
- Because I have always wanted to be more involved in group sports but have never felt safe as a 2SLGBTQ+ person in general sport spaces (i.e., those not specifically for 2SLGBTQ+ people) (average score 2.97)

Average scores for items related to improving one's physical health and mental health ranged from 3.87 to 3.97, while scores related to social wellbeing in terms of meeting others who could offer support when facing general and 2SLGBTQ+ discrimination ranged from 3.05 to 3.32.

“Yeah, the motivations are, you know, firstly get some exercise. I think I wanna meet the community a lot more, the LGBTQ community in Kitchener Waterloo.”

Mel (nonbinary, pansexual, Asian)

“You know, sometimes I feel like KW there's a really big queer population here, but there's not a lot of queer spaces.”

Kylie (trans woman, straight, white)

Program Impacts: Is the Program Making A Difference?

In addition to exploring the program's impact in the interviews, it was addressed through the pre- and post-program surveys examining reported changes in quantitative indicators for physical, mental, and social wellbeing, and engagement in group/team sports. Program impact was also explored through questions in the final survey inviting participants to retrospectively assess the programs' benefits.

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Pre- and Post Survey Results: Findings from this part of the evaluation indicate that the program is effective in improving aspects of participants' mental and social wellbeing, namely distress, overall mental health, and connectedness to the local 2SLGBTQ+ community. It was also effective in increasing participants' comfort and competency playing group/team sports. The program did not impact participants' physical health in terms of overall health, physical activity satisfaction, and eating habits satisfaction.³

Retrospective Assessment of Program Impact: In addition to questions about program impacts on well-being and engagement in group/team sports, we included questions asking for feedback on the value of the program in the context of growing anti-2SLGBTQ+ hatred in society. For all 12 questions, participants rated their response to each survey question using a 6-point scale (0 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). A higher score indicates greater endorsement for the statement.⁴

With few exceptions, average scores were relatively high. The three items with the highest scores all concern perceived benefits of the program in the context of growing anti-2SLGBTQ+ hatred in society:

Related to growing anti-2SLGBTQ+ hatred in society

- Appreciate having the drop-in program as a safe space (average score 4.71)
- Sense of belonging in the larger community/society has benefited from having the drop-in program as a safe space (average score 4.67)
- Mental health/psychological wellbeing has benefitted from having the drop-in program as a safe space (average score 4.47)

These are followed by questions about whether overall mental health has benefitted (average score 4.02), improved sport abilities (average score 3.78), and increased comfort joining sports as a 2SLGBTQ+ person (average score 3.76).

³ These results are based on 32 individuals who completed both the pre- and post-program surveys. Across nearly all 12 quantitative indicators on program outcomes, the differences in the scores between the pre- and post-program surveys suggest the program is effective. However, most of the differences in scores were not statistically significant, meaning that the differences could have occurred by chance. Therefore, above we only discuss items for which statistically significant differences were found. Also, although in the full report we examine differences for the full group of survey respondents and by race and gender, due to space limitations, we report only findings for the full group in this brief report.

⁴ These results are based on responses from 49 people.

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Lowest average scores were for items concerning social support, namely meeting other 2SLGBTQ+ people who one now views as friends (average score 2.84) and meeting other 2SLGBTQ+ people to talk with when stressed (average score 2.73).

“And I get a lot of benefit from [the program]. I think that doing physical activity is also really important for mental health as well, and I definitely experience that of being able to feel emotionally lighter after exerting myself physically. So that has been really great as well.”

Kay (nonbinary, sapphic, white, 20's)

“I'd say, like benefits, my mental health, I feel better getting some exercise and being around other queer folks. I guess that you know, I don't encounter them [other 2SLGBTQIA+ people] in my daily life very often. I guess just knowing that there's other people, I'm not alone kind of thing helps, but certainly the sports, moving around being active, yeah, helps your mental health and mood.”

Peter (man, gay, white, 20's)

“It's affected me in such a positive [way]. There is this sense of, I feel I am a part of the KW queer community now. I feel I've been to, even though it's only a couple things, I know that there is [sic] more events going on within the community. I feel that part of it.”

Rebecca (genderfluid, lesbian, 30's)

Feedback about the Program

Using a 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale, participants provided very positive feedback about their experiences of inclusion in the program, such as being able to be oneself (average score 4.47) and feeling safe/comfortable participating in the program related to one's gender (average score 4.61), sexuality (average score 4.65), and other diverse minority identities (average score 4.30).

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Participants also provided affirming feedback about the facilitators, for instance the facilitators helping participants to feel comfortable engaging in sport given their sport ability level (average score 4.59) and increased confidence in sports (average score 4.57). Across the 12 questions about program inclusion and the facilitators, average scores ranged from 4.02 to 4.65 on the 0—5 scale.

Recommendations

The full report offers recommendations across program promotion, design, and implementation, including related to findings not contained in this brief report. Below are selected recommendations. If interested in learning about all the recommendations, please see the full report.

- It is important that the program maintain the current approach to balancing competition and inclusivity by offering multiple sports with varying levels of intensity. This strategy has been effective and should be regularly reviewed to ensure it continues to meet participants' needs. Likewise, it is important to continue the practice of using pronouns in introductions and ensuring facilitators are trained in inclusivity practices. It is also recommended the check-ins at the weekly sessions be kept general and "light," so they remain accessible to participants who do not want to engage in a lot of talking.
- Related to being a safe and inclusive space for all, to foster participation by more 2SLGBTQ+ people of colour, the program should explore partnerships with local groups that serve 2SLGBTQ+ people of colour (e.g., Spectrum's BRIQ House). This could include targeted outreach, and the drop-in program could collaborate on events that celebrate and centre the experiences of racialized 2SLGBTQ+ community members. Continuing to engage racialized facilitators will also help to foster inclusion for 2SLGBTQ+ people of colour.
- When promoting the program to future cohorts it is recommended that the documented benefits of the program and participants' experiences be integrated into recruitment campaigns. It is especially important to feature the voices of individuals who have no or little prior experience with sport, to ensure that the program not only engages individuals who are already physically active.