

FOSTERING 2SLGBTQ+ INCLUSION IN SPORT AND RECREATION IN WATERLOO REGION

An Evaluation of Spectrum's 2SLGBTQ+ Rainbow
Diversity Training and Multi-Sport Drop-In Program

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INTRODUCTION

Community surveys conducted by Spectrum in 2021 documented the need for 2SLGBTQ+ recreation programs in Waterloo Region,¹ including ones that are low or no cost. In the summer of 2021, Spectrum partnered with the City of Kitchener's community centres on a survey that explored the specific needs of 2SLGBTQ+ people with respect to sports and recreation, which further supported the need for 2SLGBTQ+ recreational sport programs.

Due to discrimination, 2SLGBTQ+ people are at increased risk for negative mental and physical health. Although participation in 2SLGBTQ+ sports and recreation can help to buffer individuals from the negative effects of discrimination, 2SLGBTQ+ people often face barriers accessing these spaces, including experiencing harassment and exclusion. Trans and gender diverse people often face barriers related to the gendered nature of many team sports and spaces, such as washrooms and changerooms. The OutLook Study conducted with 526 2SLGBTQ+ people in Waterloo Region found that 38% of trans and 15% of cisgender LGBTQ+ respondents avoided gyms because of fears of harassment.² There is a need for explicitly 2SLGBTQ+ safe and welcoming sports and recreation programs in the Waterloo Region, and Spectrum set out to address this need.



With support from Sport Canada, Spectrum implemented the 2SLGBTQ+ Sports in Waterloo Region program, a pilot program that operated from April 2023 to March 2024. The pilot program was conducted in partnership with the City of Kitchener. It involved two initiatives: (1) Rainbow Diversity Training, a 2SLGBTQ+ cultural competency workshop given to interested city recreation staff and community centre volunteers/leaders, and (2) the 2SLGBTQ+ Multi-Sport Drop-In Program, a weekly drop-in sport program hosted at three community centres.³

Spectrum partnered with Dr. Michael Woodford, Professor at the Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, and his team to evaluate both initiatives. All evaluation activities and data collection tools were developed in consultation with Spectrum and were approved by Laurier's Research Ethics Board.

As seen below, a comprehensive evaluation plan was implemented for each initiative. Broadly, for each initiative the evaluation aimed to examine participants' outcomes as well as identify the initiative's strengths and areas for improvement. The evaluation also involved presenting recommendations to enhance Spectrum's programming and to inform the efforts of other 2SLGBTQ+ organizations that are considering implementing a 2SLGBTQ+ sport program or either of its two initiatives in their community.

¹ Waterloo Region includes the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener, and Waterloo, and the townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich.

² <https://yourwrrc.ca/rcc/outlook-study/>

³ Spectrum's Rainbow Diversity Training program is a longstanding initiative. Through project funding, Spectrum was able to deliver the training to the City of Kitchener's recreation staff and community centre volunteers/leaders. The multi-sport drop-in program had been running at Kitchener's Stanley Park Community Centre and Cambridge's Kinbridge Community Centre for approximately 12 months prior to the project. Funding enabled Kitchener's Downtown Community Centre to be added to the program and supported operations at the other two sites. The evaluation included the three sites.

In this report, we focus on each initiative separately, starting with Rainbow Diversity Training followed by the 2SLGBTQ+ Multi-Sport Drop-In Program. We briefly outline each initiative, including program outcomes, and describe how the initiative was implemented as part of the pilot. We then provide information about the number of participants engaged in each initiative during the pilot period. Next, we turn to the evaluation, describing our aims and evaluation methods. Thereafter, we present our findings and related reflections and recommendations. As seen below, for the Rainbow Diversity Training, we present our reflections and recommendations at the end of the section. Due to the range of topics addressed in the evaluation of the multi-sport drop-in program, we present our findings and recommendations throughout that section. For other organizations considering implementing 2SLGBTQ+ sport programming, supplementing the recommendations specific to Spectrum's implementation of each initiative, we conclude each section with broad reflections and recommendations that focus on various aspects of program design and implementation.

RAINBOW DIVERSITY TRAINING

For the project, Spectrum offered its Rainbow Diversity Training 101 workshop to City of Kitchener recreation staff and community centre neighbourhood leaders.⁴ The workshop was structured around a PowerPoint presentation given by two co-facilitators, who are employed by Spectrum. Broadly, the workshop covered who 2SLGBTQ+ people are (information about the daily challenges 2SLGBTQ+ individuals face), terminology and key concepts (2SLGBTQ+ terminology and concepts, e.g., gender identity, heterosexism), intersectionality and microaggressions (what they are and the role that these play within the 2SLGBTQ+ community), and what one can do to advance 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion (strategies for dismantling one's own misconceptions and how to become a better ally).

Program Outcomes

- Increase participants' understanding of 2SLGBTQ+ terms, experiences, challenges, and strengths.
- Help prepare participants to create inclusive spaces for 2SLGBTQ+ people.
- Help prepare participants to be allies to the 2SLGBTQ+ community, including how to effectively respond when discrimination occurs.



In terms of learning strategies, in addition to the facilitators' oral presentations, the workshop included a video (coming out stories of 2SLGBTQ+ community members in Waterloo Region),⁵ statistics and research findings about 2SLGBTQ+ people and their experiences, case studies addressing key concepts, and an empathy-building exercise. Specific attention was given transgender identities and types of transitions. Each workshop session concluded with the opportunity for participants to reflect on their biggest takeaways and what they can do to be better allies, and resource sharing. Questions were taken throughout, with dedicated time between sections of the presentation. Each workshop lasted for approximately two hours.

Training Participants: During the pilot program, Spectrum delivered seven Rainbow Diversity Training workshops to 80 City of Kitchener staff and community centre volunteers/leaders.

EVALUATION

To evaluate the Rainbow Diversity Training, we surveyed trainees before the training and following it (pre-training survey, post-training survey).⁶ We explored aspects of trainees' 2SLGBTQ+ competencies, namely their knowledge, perceived confidence in skills and

⁴ Spectrum's Rainbow Diversity Training program consists of a variety of workshops ranging from the 101- to 301-levels, with specialized presentations for HR professionals, leaders, and senior-serving organizations. Workshops are generally tailored to the needs of the participants, featuring case studies that are specific to their work. As Spectrum worked to tailor the workshop, feedback was sought from Dr. Michael Woodford and his team who provided helpful ideas and suggestions (e.g., microaggressions, illustration of 2SLGBTQ+ exclusion in sports).

⁵ <https://youtu.be/YO7t5m6cBso?si=EXWiAhgwQ6yqiSKq>

⁶ To match responses from the pre-training and post-training surveys, participants were asked to create a participant code using the first two letters of their surname, the last two digits of their year of birth, and the first two letters of their first name. Most participants provided a code.

knowledge application, use of inclusive language, and attitudes. In the post-training survey, we also asked for feedback about the training itself. Participants in all surveys received an e-gift card as an expression of thanks.

To identify key learnings and potential real-life implications of the training to trainee's work, as well as training strengths and areas for improvement, we conducted a follow-up survey with interested trainees in winter 2024.⁷

PRE-TRAINING AND POST-TRAINING SURVEY

Methodological Note

To maximize the number of individuals in our analysis comparing responses for the pre-training survey with those for the post-training survey, we used all available responses rather than those only for which responses could be matched.⁸ We performed One-sample t-test to identify if differences in average scores from the pre-training survey responses and the post-training survey responses are statistically significant. We included the effect size for the difference between the two scores using Cohen's d, with 0.10, 0.30, and 0.50 indicating small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively.

Survey Participants

Seventy-six people participated in the pre-training survey. They ranged from 19 to 78 years of age, with an average age of 40 years (SD = 13.41). Most participants identified as women (77.5%, n = 55) and one person is a member of the trans community. The majority of participants identified as heterosexual (80.0%, n = 56). In terms of participants' roles with the city, most worked in client services (55.6%, n = 40) followed by community leader/volunteer (16.7%, n = 12).

Half of the participants (50.0%, n = 38) received previous training or education on 2SLGBTQ+ topics. Nearly three-quarters of the participants had at least one 2SLGBTQ+ friend, and all but one person had at least one 2SLGBTQ+ acquaintance.

On a scale of 1 (Not at all aware) to 5 (extremely aware) the average score for participants' overall awareness of the issues impacting 2SLGBTQ+ people was 3.56 (SD = 0.90).

Primary Reason to Join the Training

52.2% wanted to understand how to effectively serve members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community in their work

14.5% were generally interested in learning more about the issues impacting 2SLGBTQ+ people and how to support them

⁷ At the end of the post-training survey, participants were asked to indicate if they might be interested in participating in a follow-up survey. If interested, they provided their name and email address. Interested individuals were contacted by a member of the evaluation team via email and invited to join the follow-up survey.

⁸ Seventy-six individuals completed the pre-training survey and 70 completed the post-training survey.

Knowledge

We inquired about participants' knowledge of 2SLGBTQ+ terminology, privilege, and inclusive pronouns practices. As outlined in Table 1, we used 14 questions including true/false/don't know questions, questions involving matching a term to the appropriate definition, and multi-choice questions (select all that apply).

As seen below, for each item the percentage of correct answers was higher in the post-training survey. With few exceptions (heterosexism item, cisnormativity item, gender expression item, and inclusive pronouns practice time), the vast majority of participants selected the correct response in the pre-training survey, with 7 of the items being correctly answered by 80% or more of the participants. After the training, 11 items were correctly answered by at least 80% of the participants. The greatest change was for the item about cisnormativity. Findings in both surveys for the item about the meaning of heterosexism are intriguing as understanding of heterosexism as discrimination against sexual minorities did not develop among trainees. On a 0—14 scale (0 = no correct answers selected, 14 = all correct answers selected), the average correct responses score for the pre-training survey was 5.91 (SD = 2.62) whereas it was 10.16 (SD = 2.33) for the post-training survey, indicating that participants' overall knowledge was greater after the training. The difference between these average scores was statistically significant with a large effect size.

Table 1: Answers to Knowledge Questions for Pre-Training and Post-Training Surveys

	Pre-Training Survey	Post-Training Survey
True/False/Don't Know Statement	% Answered Correctly	% Answered Correctly
Gender and sexuality are the same thing.	85.7	93.2
Sex assigned at birth is the same as gender identity.	80.6	90.3
Not everyone experiences sexual or romantic attraction to another person.	80.6	94.5
Heterosexism is discrimination against people who are straight.	0.03	0.10
Privilege is something you can work towards.	80.3	86.1
Match Term and Appropriate Definition		
Queer	68.1	80.0
Pansexual	79.6	81.5
Cisgender	89.4	95.7
Nonbinary	78.9	80.6
Two-Spirit	93.4	90.1
Trans	87.6	94.0
Select Appropriate Response(s)		
Gender expression	44.8	83.6
Cisnormativity	30.3	72.5
Inclusive pronouns practice when wrong pronoun is used	21.1	28.4
Overall Score	M (SD)	M (SD)
Knowledge Index ¹	5.91 (2.26)	10.16 (2.33)

¹ $p < .01$, $d = 1.82$

Confidence in Skills & Knowledge Application

Both surveys included questions about one's level of confidence in applying 2SLGBTQ+ skills and knowledge in one's work as recreation staff or community leader. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a 6-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree), with a higher average (mean) score indicating greater confidence in one's skills and knowledge application.

Questions addressed topics such as, providing a safe space for 2SLGBTQ+ program participants, awareness of 2SLGBTQ+ community resources and community groups, and being comfortable working with members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

In the pre-training survey, questions about comfort working with a trans person in one's workplace and understanding why inclusive language is important had the two highest mean scores ($M = 5.40$ and $M = 5.00$, respectively), whereas the lowest scores were for items addressing awareness of 2SLGBTQ+ community resources and groups ($M = 3.60$) and 2SLGBTQ+ friendly social services ($M = 3.39$). In the post-training survey, the questions about inclusive language and being comfortable working with a trans person in the workplace continued to have the highest mean scores ($M = 5.38$ and $M = 5.54$, respectively). Though the mean scores increased, items about 2SLGBTQ+ friendly social services and 2SLGBTQ+ community resources/groups continued to have the lowest mean scores ($M = 4.42$ and $M = 4.46$, respectively).

In Table 2, we report summary statistics for the confidence scales across the two surveys. As suggested by these statistics, the training had a positive impact on the participants' overall confidence. The overall mean score across a composite of the 10 items increased from 4.51 (0.60) to 5.05 (0.57), and the difference was found to be statistically significant with a large effect size.

Table 2: Confidence in Skills & Knowledge Application Summary Statistics Questions for Pre-Training and Post-Training Surveys

Survey	Range of Mean Scores on Items	Overall Mean (SD)	Minimum Mean	Maximum Mean
Pre-Training Survey	2.46 – 5.00	4.51 (0.60)	2.90	5.70
Post-Training Survey	4.42 -- 5.54	5.05 (0.57) ¹	3.50	5.05

¹ $p < .001$, $d = .95$.

Gender Inclusive Language

Each survey included three questions measuring the frequency that participants engaged in gender inclusive language practices (or would do so after the training). Unlike other questions in the survey about gender inclusive language which assessed knowledge and understanding, we asked behavioural questions about one's frequency of using gender neutral language (e.g., they rather than she/he), asking new program participants' their pronouns, and sharing their pronouns when meeting a new person (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = almost always, 6 = always).⁹ A higher average score indicates greater engagement with gender inclusive language practices.

⁹ In the pre-training survey, the questions addressed how often participants engaged in these behaviours; whereas in the post-training survey they were asked how often they are likely to do so.

As displayed in Table 3, average scores for each item were higher in the post-training survey compared to the pre-training surveys. Based on the response options for the 1—6 scale, it is notable that these behaviours tended to “rarely” occur except for the gender-neutral language one (item 1) which participants engaged in “sometimes” on average. In these post-training surveys, based on the actual reported mean scores the behaviours occurred “sometimes” and “often,” but when rounding up items 1, 2, and 3, these behaviours occur “often” and “almost always.”

The mean score for the composite scale was significantly higher for the post-training survey compared to the mean score for the pre-training survey, with a large effect size.

Table 3: Frequency of Gender Inclusive Behaviours for Pre-Training and Post-Training Surveys

Behaviour	Pre-Training Survey <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Post-Training Survey <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
I use gender-neutral language (e.g., they rather than she/he) to refer to people whose pronouns I do not know.	3.40 (1.44)	4.90 (0.93)
When I first meet a new program participant in my role, I ask about their pronouns	2.06 (1.12)	3.96 (1.37)
I share my pronouns when I meet a new person.	2.01 (1.38)	3.73 (1.47)
Composite scale ¹	2.49 (1.12)	4.20 (1.10)

¹ $p < .001$, $d = 1.55$.

2SLGBTQ+ Attitudes

We measured trainees’ 2SLGBTQ+ attitudes using 10 questions. Participants responded to each statement using a 6-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree). A higher average score reflects more affirming 2SLGBTQ+ attitudes. Some items addressed views toward the 2SLGBTQ+ community, generally, and others focused on sexual minorities and gender minorities, specifically. The questions assessed contemporary biases and stereotypes, such as “2SLGBTQ+ people seem to focus on the ways in which they differ from non-2SLGBTQ+ people too much” and “people who are bisexual are just unable to accept their gay or lesbian identities” rather than traditional biases, which tend to reflect blatant prejudice or are rooted moralist stances, for example “2SLGBTQ+ people are mentally ill or sinful.” We also included a question asking about views related to washrooms, “A person transitioning from male to female should not be able to use a women’s washroom.”¹⁰

As seen in Table 4, as reported in the pre-training survey, views generally tended to be in the “somewhat agree” – “agree” range as suggested by the average scores on the items. They were in the same range in the post-training survey, though the means scores were descriptively higher. The composite scale means were relatively high on our 1-6 scale (4.72 for the pre-

¹⁰ Questions were informed by earlier evaluation research conducted with OK2BME and a staff training needs assessment with the Waterloo Wellington Regional Cancer Clinic led by Dr. Woodford and published scales on contemporary trans/bi/homophobia. Negatively worded items were recoded so that a higher score reflected more affirming views.

training survey, 4.97 for the post-training survey). Though descriptively minimal, the difference in these scores was statistically significant with small effect size.

While the composite means scores overall are high, the minimum mean scores for both surveys are notable (1.86 for the pre-training survey, 2.25 for the post-training survey), suggesting that at least one participant held fairly biased views before and following the training.

Table 4: 2SLGBTQ+ Attitudes for Pre-Training and Post-Training Surveys

Survey	Range of Mean Scores on Items	Overall Scale Mean (SD)	Minimum Mean	Maximum Mean
Pre-Training Survey	4.03 – 5.08	4.72 (0.99)	1.86	6.00
Post-Training Survey	4.41 – 5.32	4.97 (1.03) ¹	2.25	6.00

¹ $p = .046$, $d = .24$.

Training Feedback

In the post-training survey, we included nine closed-ended questions and one open-ended question to collect feedback about the training. The closed-ended questions examined the training’s perceived relevance and its perceived helpfulness. For these questions, participants selected from 6-point scales (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree) except for the relevance question, which used a 5-scale (1 = not relevant, 5 = very relevant). A higher average score indicates more positive feedback. Our final question asked for comments about the training and suggestions for improvement.

As shown in Table 5, overall, participants found the training to be relevant and helpful, and particularly helpful in using inclusive language. Examining specific items, the following findings are notable:

Of the participants...

- 9.6% ($n = 7$) selected either “not relevant,” “a little relevant,” or “somewhat relevant” for the question about the training’s relevance to one’s work/leadership.
- 8.2% ($n = 6$) selected either “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” or “somewhat disagree” for the question about the training helping to challenge one’s assumptions about gender and sexuality.
- 6.8% ($n = 5$) selected “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” or “somewhat disagree” for the questions about the training helping trainees to develop tools to support trans and gender diverse youth.
- 6.9% ($n = 5$) selected “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” or “somewhat disagree” for the questions about learning new things in the training.

Table 5: Workshop Feedback

Statement	Most Popular Response	M (SD)
Now that you have completed the training, how relevant do you think the training is to your work/leadership?	Very relevant	4.41 (0.80)
<i>How well has the training helped you to ...</i>		
Understand ways to reduce barriers that 2SLGBTQ+ people may face in recreation	Agree	5.23 (0.70)
Understand what I can do to help foster a sense of belonging for 2SLGBTQ+ individuals and their families in the broader community.	Agree	5.21 (0.77)
Use inclusive language.	Strongly agree	5.42 (0.62)
Develop the tools to be an advocate for 2SLGBTQ+ people.	Agree	5.03 (0.87)
Better understand gender and sexual diversity.	Agree	5.18 (0.95)
Challenge my assumptions about gender and sexuality.	Agree	4.89 (1.01)
Develop tools to support trans and gender diverse youth.	Agree	4.88 (1.04)
I learned new things in the workshop. ¹	Strongly agree	5.35 (1.14)

¹ On the survey this item read, "I did NOT learn anything new in the workshop." We recoded the response and revised the wording here for consistency with the other items and the interpretation of the average score.

Narrative Feedback

Participants provided a mix of positive and constructive feedback on the training program. Many praised the training for being informative, valuable, and relevant, with several individuals noting that the clear presentations helped them better understand the 2SLGBTQ+ community and how to be effective allies. Some noted appreciation for the safe space created by the facilitators for open conversations, which enhanced their learning experience. Several comments emphasized the importance of the training in making them feel more confident in supporting 2SLGBTQ+ community members, highlighting an overall positive potential impact on their professional roles.

"The instructors did a great job creating a safe place for conversations. Well, done presentation—I feel it was rushed, lots to learn and understand, the knowledge is very important to our customer service role."

"It would be nice to have more specific examples in Rec. How can I make people feel welcome? Who can help with this? Info was great but would love an action plan."

Some participants suggested areas for improvement. There were requests for longer or more frequent sessions to allow for deeper exploration of the topics, as well as more discussion time to address complex issues. A few participants also recommended incorporating more specific examples relevant to their work environments, particularly in recreation and community centres, to make the training more

applicable. Additionally, there were calls for more resources and information on supporting the 2SLGBTQ+ community, particularly in terms of providing practical action plans and additional online resources.

"Great training, very informative! Including information about resources for 2SLGBTQ+ people would be very valuable and feels distinctly missing."

To enhance the program further, participants suggested including more in-depth discussions on how to make recreation spaces more 2SLGBTQ+ friendly, including the implementation of all-gender washrooms.

They also recommended extending the training to more staff members, including community centre instructors

and volunteers, to ensure broader awareness and support within the community. Some also suggested offering the training more broadly to recreation program participants and other members of the general community and hosting these trainings within the community centres. Most importantly, the suggestions for improvement focused on a desire for more comprehensive and practical training that is closely aligned with the specific needs of the participants' work environments.

Strengths of the Training

Comprehensive Content Delivery: The training effectively raised awareness about key issues facing the 2SLGBTQ+ community, particularly in mental health and safety. By incorporating statistics and personal testimonies, the training managed to resonate emotionally with the participants, fostering a deeper understanding and empathy.

Practical Application: The training was praised for providing practical tools and strategies that participants could immediately implement in their workplaces. This includes the use of inclusive/gender-neutral language, and the encouragement of visible support symbols such as pride flags.

Engagement and Receptivity: Participants generally found the training engaging and felt that it created a safe space for asking questions and discussing sensitive topics. This receptivity was crucial in facilitating an open dialogue and ensuring that the training was interactive and impactful.

FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

We conducted an online survey early winter 2024 with interested training participants.¹¹ Participants received an e-gift card as an expression of thanks. The survey included closed-ended questions assessing perceptions about the training's usefulness and impact in terms of participants' confidence to create safe, affirming spaces with 2SLGBTQ+ recreation participants. Other close-ended questions inquired about one's use of inclusive language and pronoun practice. We used open-ended questions to explore participants' primary learnings, personal growth, and situations in which they and colleagues applied what they learned from the training, with these findings illustrating training impact. Given the assumption that trainees would apply training content to their work, we asked about workplace factors that supported application as well as barriers. Finally, we inquired about training strengths and areas for improvement,

¹¹ Individuals who participated in the pre-/post-training survey were asked to indicate if they might be interested in participating in the follow-up survey. Interested persons provided their names and email addresses. We contacted these individuals by email and invited them to join the follow-up survey and sent two reminder emails. Fourteen individuals completed the follow-up survey.

including gaps. Alongside directly asking about gaps, we also asked about situations in which participants were not prepared to intervene to support a 2SLGBTQ+ person.

Training Usefulness, Confidence, and Inclusive Language and Practices

As outlined in Table 6, concerning their perceptions of the training's usefulness and confidence in creating a safe space and an environment of mutual trust and respect, across the three items most participants selected one of the agree options. The wider variety of responses for the question about training's usefulness compared to the other two questions is noteworthy, possibly suggesting that the training's relevance to one's work or role with the city is an area in need of improvement.

With respect to using gender neutral language and inclusive pronoun use, responses were diverse across the three items. The results suggest that participants overall are more comfortable using gender-neutral language given that participants selected either "often," "almost always," or "always." In comparison, they are less engaged in inclusive pronoun use (i.e., asking a person's pronouns, sharing one's pronouns) where most participants reported "never," "rarely," or "sometimes" (8 individuals for asking about pronouns, 10 individuals for sharing one's pronouns).

Table 6: Training Impact (N = 14)

Survey Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Domain: Perceptions of Utility and Confidence						
I have found what I learned to be useful in my work/role with the City of Kitchener.	1	-	1	3	5	4
I am confident I could provide a safe space for 2SLGBTQ+ program participants (a space where they felt respected and included)	1	-	-	-	6	7
I am confident I could establish an atmosphere of mutual trust and affirmation when working with 2SLGBTQ+ program participants.	1	-	-	-	7	6
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Always
Domain: Gender Neutral Language and Pronouns						
I use gender-neutral language (e.g., they rather than she/he) to refer to people whose pronouns I do not know.	-	-	-	4	8	2
When I first meet a new program participant, I ask about their pronouns.	2	3	3	4	2	-
I share my pronouns when I meet a new program participant.	3	1	6	2	1	1

Note. We report raw numbers rather than percentages because of the small number of participants.

Key Learnings

Many participants, including one who belongs to the 2SLGBTQ+ community, acknowledged an increase in their understanding of how to foster inclusive environments, particularly using gender-neutral language and proper pronoun usage. Some emphasized learning the importance of subtle language changes in promoting a sense of belonging and safety. In one case, the alarming statistics on the mental health challenges faced by the 2SLGBTQ+ community resonated deeply, and learning about the 2SLGBTQ+ community's experiences with discrimination prompted calls for proactive support structures within the workplace. Some comments highlighted the value of what they learned to their work.

"I am part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. I still feel that I learned a lot about how to approach people with non-binary language. This doesn't always come naturally even to people within the community."

"I learned that using improper pronouns can cause mental anguish and turmoil that I didn't fully understand the extent of prior to the training."

"The training has been particularly useful in the work I do teaching programs to youth--they are always more open and receptive when I introduce myself with my pronouns and let them know that it a safe and respectful space for everyone in our program."

"I think it is useful to know that it is okay to make a mistake, to correct it and move on and not make a big fuss. Simply apologize, correct myself and keep going--I think prior to taking the training I have seen it in myself, and my colleagues, the desire to "get it right" can sometimes hold us back from making conversation or asking about pronouns. Now, I am not anxious about it and routinely ask about pronouns."

"I didn't realize that community centre's weren't a top place of where members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community can feel safe. Since the course, we took a look around our centre to see where we could improve and show our support and that they have just as much of a right here as anyone does where they can feel safe/included."

One participant noted they learned nothing new, suggesting the training may need to assess participant baseline knowledge and offer multiple trainings at differing levels of depth or complexity.

Personal Growth and Insights

Participants expressed that the training had a profound impact on their awareness and attitudes towards the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Increased awareness and understanding have led to more compassionate interactions both within and outside of the workplace. For some, the training also sparked discussions about inclusivity in their personal lives, indicating the training's broad-reaching impact on trainees' perspectives and behaviours.

"[I'm] more aware of what is actually a safe space and what is claiming to be without real actions behind it."

"Realizing how much it meant to people by "just" putting up the flags -- I wasn't aware of the positive impact that people within the community (or just in general) would feel. It's made me

more aware of something that I think won't really mean much, it truly does and what else I can do either at work or in my personal life.”

“I feel the training has helped me foster a greater sense of empathy for those who are struggling with their identity.”

“My daughter has come out as bisexual—we are very proud and supportive of her, but it has been challenging with some members of my extended family. I have definitely used some of the information I got in the training in discussions I have had with my family.”

Important Note

Survey responses indicate a wide range of baseline knowledge and perspectives from participants who would have appreciated a more advanced training (who have lived experience or education that goes beyond the scope of an introductory training) to those who came with their own transphobic viewpoints. The following quotation reflects the latter.

“At the end of the day, you are either a man or a woman, a male or female (intersex aside) and gender pronouns overly complicate things. With that being said, I recognize the pain that many people from this community are in. When crossing paths with someone who align with pronouns that don't make sense to me, I recognize I am in no place to tell them how best they should live their lives. I respect their pronouns and who they say they are even if I disagree.”

This comment suggests the continued presence of transphobic viewpoints amongst City of Kitchener staff. While educational opportunities like the Rainbow Diversity Training can provide resources to support a change in viewpoint that is based in scientific research, the City of Kitchener itself is responsible for ensuring that these views do not translate into microaggressions or overt actions that may harm 2SLGBTQ+ people's participation in city programs.

Application of Training Content in Work

Illustrations of applying training content to work reflect what survey participants did themselves and observations of their colleague's actions.

While a few participants noted they had not had the chance to apply their learnings directly, numerous participants shared implementing changes in their daily interactions and physical work environments. This includes the introduction of inclusive signage and the normalization of sharing pronouns. These changes are credited with fostering a more welcoming atmosphere.

Participants also reported a more thoughtful approach to program offerings, moving away from gender-specific activities to more inclusive programming, which they believe has been well-received by community members. One individual shared intervening when a community member engaged in homophobic behaviour, and another described how they supported a young person and created an affirming space.

“In order to better support our neighbours from the 2SLGBTQ+ community we are showing our love by including more pride items (art, flags) in our centre. We have added inclusive signage to our non-gendered washroom.”

“I have encouraged the groups that I work with to use inclusive language and that we do not need boys’ basketball, girls dance, etc., and then putting levels of skills is more important than gender.”

“By our desk, we have a small paper rainbow flag posted on our plexiglass. One day, we had a patron get upset and rip the flag down. I did engage with that individual and asked them to leave the centre. I explained to him that we are an inclusive and safe space for all members of our community, and he was welcome to be in our centre, if he could display appropriate, respectful, and kind behaviour. If he was not willing to do that, then he would have to leave.”

“I’d like to share a story about a situation that happened to me as an instructor. I work with youth at my centre. I had a child write a story about a blossoming relationship between two girls--it really was a lovely story, so I suggested that she share it at our open mic reading. She became very timid and said she couldn’t share it publicly because she couldn’t let her parents know. She said that her parents were “very [specific ethnicity]” and would not understand. I asked her how I could support her, and I shared with her that in our program, she was safe to write what she wants to write and that she is safe to be who she is. I asked her if she had anyone to talk to about the issues she was having with her parents. She didn’t. I asked if she’d like some resources on where she could go to get more information, or support. Because of the training I received, I was able to refer her to the OK2BME program and shared information about Spectrum with her. I was so happy to have had that knowledge and those resources for her. Particularly in a moment when she was feeling vulnerable. She has continued to come to my program because it is a place she feels seen and heard.”

As for colleagues’ actions, observations included increased mindfulness among staff regarding language use and a general shift towards more inclusive behaviours, such as sharing one’s pronouns and asking for people’s pronouns. However, it was noted that these changes are not always consistent and sometimes require reminders, coaching, or mentoring suggesting that ongoing reinforcement and perhaps a more formalized support system could be beneficial to maintain these practices.

Support and Barriers to Applying Training

The presence of supportive colleagues and leadership was frequently highlighted as crucial in facilitating the use of inclusive practices. Conversely, the absence of ongoing training, resources, and refreshers was noted as a barrier, preventing staff from feeling fully confident in their abilities to consistently apply what they learned. Others noted that a larger attendance at the training by colleagues would have led to a greater impact. This feedback underscores the importance of continued education and support to integrate inclusive practices in an ongoing way.

“I feel that our supervisors and colleagues are very supportive and engaged in creating a community centre environment where people in the 2SLGBTQ+ community feel safe and welcome. I do think that having some follow-up training with different centres could be really useful. Each centre has a different feel and is servicing different populations depending on where they are in Kitchener—having training sessions that bring us together (instead of just having discussions with our colleagues at our own centres) could open-up the dialogue and lead to more learning opportunities.”

Training Gaps and Recommendations

Feedback identified several gaps in the training. There is a need for more comprehensive intervention strategies to handle negative reactions from the public towards inclusive initiatives, such as displaying pride flags or managing gender-neutral facilities. Participants expressed a desire for such training to include practical advice on dealing with resistance or hostility while maintaining safety and respect for all involved (i.e., acting out “real life” scenarios). This suggests a gap in training related to conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques in the context of 2SLGBTQ+ affirmation.

“I think the hard part is if someone were to make a rude comment about us having the flag up, what is the best response? Obviously, I never want a problem to escalate but I also don't want to pretend I didn't hear it because I'm someone who sticks up for what is right.”

“There was a small element of prejudice among the clients at the time. I had always addressed this kind of thing politely in my life. Not sure if anyone else felt more secure about doing this. It would be beneficial to those in customer service to address this issue in your training. It's a sensitive issue when dealing with customers. “The customer is always, right?” No. But how do you handle it?”

“It can be a very uncomfortable, and potentially frightening when we have to engage in conversations that challenge a person's belief systems. At our centre, we work well as a team and make sure we have someone who can back us up, if necessary, but I can understand where some people might not want to engage, or maybe don't feel they have enough training to engage in these difficult and important conversations.”

Several participants made comments identifying a need to further discuss gender inclusion and washrooms.

“I still have a hard time with inclusivity when it comes to the washrooms. Many people have rights, and while there's never been a direct situation at work, I am concerned how to support

Areas for Improvement

Follow-Up and Continuous Learning: While the initial training session was well-received, there is a need for ongoing support and follow-up. Participants expressed a desire for refresher sessions and continued learning opportunities to help reinforce and build upon their initial training. This could include regular workshops, updates on best practices, and access to additional resources (i.e., short video trainings).

Handling Resistance: Participants indicated a gap in training regarding how to handle resistance or negative reactions from the public or colleagues concerning inclusive practices. Training could be improved by incorporating more comprehensive conflict resolution techniques and strategies for dealing with backlash in a constructive and safe manner.

Advanced Content for Experienced Participants: Some participants felt that the training could better cater to varying levels of prior knowledge about 2SLGBTQ+ issues. Offering differentiated training sessions or advanced modules could help ensure that all participants find the content relevant and challenging, thereby enhancing learning outcomes for those with more background knowledge.

Cultural and Religious Sensitivity: A few participants noted that the training could improve by directly addressing the complexities of cultural and religious perspectives on 2SLGBTQ+ issues. Including content that respectfully engages these perspectives and provides clear guidance on City of Kitchener policies could help create more inclusive environments and prevent religious-based homophobia from affecting City of Kitchener programming.

both parties in that situation. I wish there was more real-life scenarios.”

“It would have been helpful to learn how to address situations where there are only female and male bathrooms. What is the appropriate way to help someone who doesn't feel comfortable using labelled bathrooms and what the best practice would be.”

Pinpointing another potential gap in the training, a participant expressed concern that the training did not seem to engage with the cultural or religious beliefs of the trainees. Related, incorporating an element in the training on how to dialogue with recreation program participants of differing religious or cultural backgrounds about 2SLGBTQ+ safety and inclusion might help address this concern without directly speaking to staff about their own religious-based homo/transphobia.

Some other feedback indicated a desire for more advanced discussions about gender and sexuality, suggesting a gap in content for those already familiar with basic concepts. This may suggest a need for a two-part training that builds upon itself.

Finally, there is a clear call for the incorporation of more detailed scenarios and case studies in the training, which would help participants better understand how to apply their knowledge in real-world situations. Additionally, participants suggested that more frequent training sessions, more discussion time, and ongoing discussions post-training could help reinforce and expand upon the initial lessons, ensuring that the knowledge remains fresh and top of mind.

Reflections and Recommendations

- The findings from the pre-training and post-training surveys found statistically significant increases in participants' 2SLGBTQ knowledge, confidence, inclusive pronoun practices, and 2SLGBTQ+ attitudes scores, demonstrating the effectiveness of the training.
- In the post-training survey, participants provided positive feedback on the training's relevance and usefulness to their role, particularly in fostering inclusive environments. However, there were calls for more in-depth discussions, practical examples, and ongoing support, highlighting areas where the training could be enhanced. The follow-up survey revealed similar findings.
- Based on the feedback provided, we recommend the program consider developing a needs assessment tool to use with trainees to identify their training needs and then, as possible, tailor the training to participants' learning needs and the specific workplace. As well, we recommend the program offer more advanced modules or ongoing training sessions to accommodate participants with different levels of prior knowledge. This would ensure that all participants find the content relevant and can continue to build on their learning over time.
- Where possible, the training should incorporate more real-life scenarios, particularly those involving conflict resolution and dealing with resistance to inclusive practices. This would better equip participants to handle challenging situations in their work environments.
- Some evaluation participants recommended that the training include content that engages with cultural and religious perspectives on 2SLGBTQ+ issues. If the program pursues this direction, great care is needed, and the program might wish to consult with experts in the interpretation of religious texts.
- In the spirit of offering ongoing training, Spectrum might consider establishing a system for ongoing support, such as refresher sessions, regular workshops, and access to additional resources. This would help reinforce initial training and provide staff with the tools they need to maintain inclusive practices in their daily work.

HOW RAINBOW DIVERSITY TRAINING CONTRIBUTES TO CREATING SAFER SPACES FOR 2SLGBTQ+ PEOPLE

The Rainbow Diversity Training 101 program contributes to creating a safe place for 2SLGBTQ+ persons as suggested by trainee's enhanced competencies and reports of trainees engaging in inclusive practices within their workplaces. Though areas for improvement and growth exist, the training effectively raises awareness about key issues facing the 2SLGBTQ+ community, particularly in mental health and safety, and addresses how to create gender inclusion through inclusive pronouns practices. By including personal testimonies and relevant statistics and engaging participants in an empathy activity, it fosters personal insights and understanding among participants, which are crucial for creating safe and supportive environments. Practices, such as the use of inclusive language are immediately applicable in the workplace, helping to establish environments where 2SLGBTQ+ individuals feel respected and included.

It is critical that each workshop be tailored to the participants' workplace. Through case studies reflecting the issues 2SLGBTQ+ people face in recreational spaces; participants can not only learn about the real-life barriers 2SLGBTQ+ people face in sports but can also gain insights about how to be ally when harassment and discrimination occur in these spaces. These elements collectively contribute to the creation of a safer, more inclusive environment for 2SLGBTQ+ persons in the spaces where training participants work and interact. In the workplace, one's learning can be reinforced by colleagues and supervisors who also participated in the training or similar workshops, and workplace systems, like performance evaluation that incorporate engaging in 2SLGBTQ+ inclusive practices.

2SLGBTQ+ MULTI-SPORT DROP-IN PROGRAM

The Multi-Sport Drop-In Program involved offering free, weekly, drop-in sport activities for 2SLGBTQ+ adults (18+ years) in Waterloo Region. In partnership with city departments, it was offered at the City of Kitchener's Stanley Park Community Centre (running early afternoon on Saturdays) and Downtown Community Centre (running late afternoon on Saturdays),¹² and the City of Cambridge's Kinbridge Neighbourhood Community Centre (running Tuesday evenings).¹³ The program was advertised via Spectrum's social media platforms (e.g., website, Instagram), outreach to community groups, and word-of-mouth. Interested individuals registered online for the program and once registered could attend any of the weekly drop-in sessions at any site.

Spectrum hired a part-time (16 hours per week) Sports Coordinator to help manage the program, who also served as the primary facilitator. They worked to schedule activities, schedule co-facilitators, recruit guest coaches, advertise the program, and manage registration, and collaborated with the evaluation team as needed. Spectrum paid co-facilitators to work with the Sports Coordinator to facilitate sessions. The facilitators received training in accessibility, health and safety, and anti-racism, as well as completed Spectrum's Rainbow Diversity Training.

Program Outcomes

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

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

Depending on the number of attendees and their interests, various sports and activities were run each week, often sports requiring different levels of ability and comfort in sports. When the group was small (range 2 – 5 people), sports such as pickleball, badminton, and basketball shooting games were offered. When the group was larger, pickleball, badminton, and basketball shooting games, were paired with more competitive sports, such as volleyball, dodgeball, floor hockey, indoor soccer, and 3v3 basketball. Volleyball, pickleball, dodgeball, and badminton were particularly popular sports.



At times, depending on participants' interests and the availability of guest coaches and instructors, the program offered pickleball, badminton, volleyball, combat sports, yoga, dance, and basketball, which were led by guest coaches/instructors. The coordinator identified and invited the guest coaches and instructors and provided them with an overview of the program's aims and its nature, including participants' differing levels of sport ability. Participants seemed to

especially enjoy pickleball, volleyball, yoga, combat sports, and dance as these were offered more than once during the program's pilot implementation.¹⁴

¹² Spectrum paid the City of Kitchener to keep its Downtown Community Centre open beyond usual hours on Saturdays so the program would be the only activity running in the space.

¹³ Each site has a gender-inclusive washroom.

¹⁴ Engaging guest coaches and instructors is beneficial to program participants in terms of exposure to particular sports and activities and to the facilitators who gain new knowledge and skills.

Drop-in Participants: For the pilot program, 210 individuals participated in the program between April 1, 2023, and March 31, 2024, across the three sites. During that period, 37 drop-in sessions were hosted at the Downtown Community Centre, and the largest one had 28 attendees. Thirty sessions were held at the Stanley Park Community Centre, with 21 people being the largest group. At the Kinbridge Community Centre, 19 sessions were run, and the largest one had 10 attendees.

EVALUATION

To assess the drop-in program’s impacts and identify ways to enhance it we conducted semi-structured one-on-one interviews and online surveys with program participants and conducted semi-structured one-on-one interviews and a focus group with program facilitators. The following table presents the evaluation activities and when they occurred.

Table 7: Evaluation Activities

Time Period	Spring-Summer 2023	Fall 2023	Winter 2024
Evaluation Activity	Interviews with program participants	Online survey with program participants	Interviews with program participants
		Interviews with facilitators	Online survey with program participants
			Focus group with facilitators

Program participants were invited to express their interest in joining the evaluation project when they registered for the drop-in program.¹⁵ We recruited participants for each evaluation activity among the pool of interested individuals via email. As well, flyers were distributed at program sessions for each evaluation activity.¹⁶ Selected program facilitators were invited to join the evaluation project.¹⁷

Each evaluation activity and the related findings are discussed below with separate sections for the qualitative (interviews, focus groups) and the quantitative (online surveys) components. Given the various topics addressed herein, using textboxes entitled “Reflections and Recommendations” to facilitate clarity and comprehension, we present key reflections and recommendations at the end of the section addressing the qualitative component. Given the amount and diversity of quantitative data, also using textboxes we present our reflections and recommendations throughout the section on the quantitative component. Our recommendations are applicable to Spectrum and other organizations interested in implementing a version of the multi-sport drop-in program. At the end of the report, to support the implementation of the multi-sport drop-in programming in other communities, we present other reflections related to the question: How can 2SLGBTQ+ multi-sport programming be structured and delivered in a

¹⁵ The program registration form included a question asking if the individual was interested in joining the evaluation project. The names and emails of those who expressed interest were provided to the evaluation team.

¹⁶ For the interviews interested individuals were asked to contact a member of the evaluation team. For the surveys, interested individuals could scan a QR code on the flyer to be directed to an online survey.

¹⁷ Based on their experience in the role, four program facilitators were invited to join the evaluation. They were contacted by email by a member of the evaluation team and invited to join the evaluation.

manner that is suitable and sustainable in other communities with a similar population as Waterloo Region or smaller?

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Semi-Structured Personal Interviews with Program Participants

We interviewed program participants in spring-summer 2023 and winter 2024. The interviews were conducted virtually and were recorded, lasting approximately 45 – 60 minutes. Each recording was transcribed verbatim, and we used an inductive thematic coding approach to identify themes. Where appropriate, feedback was shared with program facilitators to implement change in upcoming drop-in sessions. Interested interviewees were provided with an e-gift card to thank them for their participation.

During the spring-summer 2023 interviews, we asked interviewees about their history with sport, experiences with the program and how it impacted their wellbeing, and perspectives on how the program could be improved. These interviews addressed program offerings before the start of the pilot program's implementation supported by Sport Canada. Eight individuals were interviewed and were diverse across gender, sexual orientation, and race and ethnicity. In terms of gender, interview participants identified as nonbinary, transgender, genderfluid, women, and men. They used terms like pansexual, queer, gay, bisexual, lesbian, and straight to describe their sexual orientation. Half of interview participants identified their racial or ethnic background as white, while others identified as Black, Latino, and Asian.

In addition to exploring the topics discussed in the first set of interviews, during the winter 2024 interviews we asked interviewees if seasonality, weather, or a change in drop-in program activities impacted their experiences in the program. We interviewed 10 individuals, none of whom participated in the earlier interviews.¹⁸ We were again able to recruit a diverse group of interviewees across gender, sexual orientation, and race and ethnicity. Second round interview participants were nonbinary, transgender, agender, women, and men. They used language like Two-Spirit, bisexual, omnisexual, gay, sapphic, and “not straight” to describe their sexual orientation. Interviewees referred to their race/ethnicity as First Nations, Middle Eastern, Asian, and white. These interviewees ranged from 18 to 40 years old.¹⁹

Across both interview groups, participants used language to describe their other identities like fat, autistic, neurodivergent, and poor. Where appropriate, the identities shared by participants are given with the quotations presented below. Lastly, the interviewees had participated at all three program sites. We use pseudonyms below to maintain confidentiality.

Semi-Structured Personal Interviews and Focus Group with Program Facilitators

Both the interviews and focus group were held virtually. In the interviews, we invited the facilitators to share their general experiences coordinating the program and more specifically to discuss strategies they used to address issues and facilitate inclusion (e.g., when differing comfort with team sports exist among participants, trans inclusion) and any barriers they

¹⁸ This exclusion was intentional as we wanted to hear from as many different program participants as possible, especially given the overlap in topics across the two rounds of interviews.

¹⁹ Age was not captured in the first round of interviews.

observed or were aware of that individuals faced to participating in the drop-in program and ways they might have addressed these, if possible. The interview guide was also informed by the analysis of the first set of program participant interviews, allowing facilitators the opportunity to expand on the identified themes. Two months later, in the focus group we asked the facilitators to further reflect on their earlier interview responses, including concerning the themes from program participant interviews, and their role in creating inclusive sport programming for Waterloo Region's 2SLGBTQ+ communities. The interviews and focus group were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were then coded using inductive thematic analysis. Participation in the evaluation was included in facilitators' paid work with the program. Four facilitators participated in the evaluation. We use pseudonyms when presenting quotations from the facilitators.

What's Ahead

Below we present findings related to participants' previous experiences with sports, reasons for joining the program, as well as reflections about program outcomes and experiences, including the strategies used by facilitators to run effective, meaningful, and inclusive programming. Reflecting the inductive nature of qualitative research, in discussing program outcomes, we are not limited to the program's official outcomes. Finally, we outline findings related to challenges faced in running the program. Our key reflections and recommendations are presented at the end of this section.

Findings

Previous Experiences with Sports and Physical Activity

Research on 2SLGBTQ+ people in sport and physical activity highlights that 2SLGBTQ+ people often face homophobia, transphobia, and stigma when participating in sports and physical activity. Thus, before exploring program participants' experiences with the drop-in program and its impacts, we examined interviewee's previous sport and physical activity experiences, including with team-based sports. Unsurprisingly, negative histories with sport were common across many of the interviewees. For some individuals, sexuality- and gender identity-based stigma intersected with other forms of marginalization, like fat-phobia, to deter them from participating in sport, specifically team-based sports. For example, Max shares how they understand their experiences of bullying in sport as a reflection of the ways that fatness and gender intersect:

“Also, I was a fat kid. I was big and cause I grew up being seen as a girl, right? That was my childhood and so I think in a lot of ways, I was forcibly defeminized because of my body shape and size so it was seen as more acceptable to pick on me in certain ways that maybe these kids were bullying me would not have done to a girl who was smaller or more petite. They just wouldn't have done that because they knew that that wouldn't have been seen as appropriate.” – Max (bisexual, nonbinary, white, fat)

While many participants had experienced bullying in sports (gym class and youth sports in particular), we also heard from participants how their previous participation in sports and physical activity had been an important part of their identity formation and supported their mental health. Below, Marcy shares how joining a gym as an adult introduced her to diverse representations of womanhood, including more masculine and muscular presenting women, that made her feel more comfortable in her identity:

“There is more women like me, I think there’s such a physical representation of queerness to me as well. And then yeah, I think slowly more I was able to be myself.” – Marcy (lesbian, masculine woman, 30s)

Reasons for Joining the Program

There were two overarching interrelated drivers to participate in the drop-in sports program, stronger social relationships and to improve health. The most shared reason among interview participants was to build stronger social relationships with other 2SLGBTQ+ people and wanting to connect with the 2SLGBTQ+ community, which some interviewees described as challenging for 2SLGBTQ+ people in the region.

“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 (transwoman, straight, white)

“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)

For some participants, like Rachel, the desire to connect with other 2SLGBTQ+ people and community was a way to find a sense of belonging and improve their mental health.

“I wanted to be a part of a community cause growing up when I wasn’t out. I was actually part of a church community and there’s this positive feeling that comes from that that I think I hadn’t really realized I was missing. I wanted to feel that again, to be a part of something, to meet regularly with people that sort of have the same ideals and outlook on life as me.” – Rachel (woman, queer, white)

Concerning physical health, some participants also identified that joining the drop-in program was a way that they could build routines that supported their physical health. Carlos shared how he sees the multi-sport program as an opportunity to both meet other 2SLGBTQ+ people as a newcomer but also to support his physical health as he ages:

“I was not able to express my whole self back in my home country. So right now, being here in Canada, I see that [2SLGBTQ+] is more widely accepted, I would say. So, I been trying to get involved in LGBTQ+ community, to try to get involved in the community. Also, because I’m aging, but I feel like I need to get more active in terms of sports” – Carlos (man, gay, Black/Latino)

Program Impacts: Promoting Physical, Mental and Social Wellbeing and More

The drop-in program was implemented to support participants’ physical, mental, and social wellbeing. As seen below, positive impacts were reported for each of these outcomes.

Many participants shared how participation in the drop-in program resulted in improvements to their physical health, giving them opportunities to exercise and reach their physical activity goals.

“It’s just been really helpful, it’s sort of a first step in [support] of my goals of being more active to actually be doing something.” – Kylie (transwoman, straight, white)

“It’s been positive. I’ve been able to mostly maintain a really good level of physical activity that I just hadn’t before, I’ve had a very sedentary lifestyle.” – Max (bisexual, nonbinary, white, fat)

Kay also identified how there is a beneficial relationship for them between the physical activity the sport drop-in program provides and their mental health. That is, by improving one, they are improving the other as well.

“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)

Like Kay, Peter also notes that the program helped with his mental health because of the exercise involved. Peter also mentioned the program’s social component.

“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 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)

For the majority of participants, the drop-in program was able to facilitate the development of stronger social and community bonds with 2SLGBTQ+ people, which helped to promote their wellbeing.

“Yeah, I felt so positive afterwards. I think just in general. I don’t have a very strong social network anyway, so it felt really helpful to be a part of [the program].” – Katie (woman, queer)

In Katie’s quotation, she discusses how the strengthening of her social ties in turn supports her emotional wellbeing. As seen below, Rebecca, also shared how participating in the program helped them to feel a new sense of belonging in Kitchener-Waterloo.

“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)

While not a proposed program outcome, related to having negative previous experiences with sports, some program participants shared how participating in the drop-in program allowed them to rewrite narratives about themselves as athletes. Some shared that participating had been healing and, as Arthur elaborated below, had helped them find joy in sports after not feeling welcome.

“So, it’s really rewarding for me to be in that space. And to reflect upon being a kid and not being comfortable exercising and being in gym class and making jokes or purposely getting out of a sport or purposely being silly or purposely spiking the ball in a silly way, because I wasn’t confident with myself and the norms of masculinity.” – Arthur (gay, cisgender man, Asian, 20’s)

Another outcome that emerged from the interviews that is not reflected in the program's formal outcomes concerns the value that the drop-in program had as a complement to Spectrum's mental health and social support programs. We heard from some participants, like Andrea, how the drop-in sport program felt easier to access than a traditional support group because they did not feel the same pressure to disclose personal details but were able to organically find support among other 2SLGBTQ+ people.

"For me, because I feel like in every other [Spectrum] program, you're expected in every other activity geared towards queer people, you're expected to and talk and interact with people. And the expectation in the sport program is not [that]. Your main task is not to [verbally] interact, it is to have fun and play right. So, I can make friends through this activity rather than through talking." – Andrea (bisexual, Latin, girl)

Program Experiences and Strategies: Fostering Belonging and Inclusion

Note

Below we explore participants' experiences in the program related to belonging and inclusion in terms of their sport abilities, desired level of competitiveness, and identities. Because program facilitators are responsible for planning and implementing weekly sessions and play a vital role in fostering program participants' belonging and inclusion, below we integrate data from the interviews with program participants and the interviews and focus group with facilitators.

A theme from both the interviews with program participants and facilitators was the complexity of navigating the level of competition for the drop-in program. All program interviewees shared that the facilitators did a good job of facilitating a level of competition that was fun and accessible – no one reported feeling excluded or knew of others who felt excluded. The program's fun and accessible nature was established in multiple ways. For example, how the program was described by the facilitators during weekly check-ins at the start of each session, including rules for the program or the selected sport itself, to the choice of sports being played, often with differing levels of ability and competitiveness happening simultaneously.

Even those who identified as enjoying a higher level of competition in sports said that they were happy with the level of sport in the program, even if it was not physically challenging. Interviewees, such as Laine and Jay, shared that they found the program to be well balanced and engaging despite it not being competitive.

"One of the times I went, and it was pickleball. It was really nice, because they kind of divided it up to different levels, so people that were newer or maybe wanted more practice were playing together versus people that play pickleball more frequently and have been coming frequently." – Laine (bisexual, nonbinary, white)

"Since it's a drop-in and it's more recreational, it's not gonna be the most competitive environment. I think there's a good mix as to where you can still go in and be a bit more competitive and you're not judged for that." – Jay (bisexual, trans man, white)

The fact that program participants with diverse sports experiences and skill levels found the program effectively balanced their desired levels of competition highlights the efforts made by the program facilitators. In our interviews with the facilitators, they highlighted how differing

levels of skill and desired competition among the program participants might deter people from continuing to participate in the drop-in program.

“If you're not confident in volleyball and someone is doing overhand serves and you have to return that, that feels very competitive, and it feels a little bit more intense. I have witnessed and overheard comments that people are uncomfortable when that's happening. I've also observed that on days where we're mostly playing badminton, if there is a player who's very skilled and they end up on a court with people who aren't at that skill level, I can just kind of see their eyes glaze over a little bit, they were hoping for something different. They were hoping for different people to be playing with them so it's a difficult thing to balance.” – Kai (facilitator)

When asked to speak to what strategies they use to address the varying degrees of competition and skill, facilitators shared that they try to program multiple sports, with differing levels of competition, instead of one larger sport.

“If we have two courts of badminton set up, we're gonna play a little bit more of a high intensity game [on one] and this one is low intensity, and let people kind of self-determine which route they think they would be best in rather than addressing skill level or whatnot” – Kai (facilitator)

The facilitators understood the importance of ensuring that people who might be new to sport or have less experience not be made to feel undervalued and unwelcome in relation to their more experienced peers. They explained that this was discussed as part of their check-in procedure at the start of every session.

While facilitators fostered an environment where program participants of diverse skill levels felt supported, some 2SLGBTQ+ participants still experienced anxiety about participating because of past negative experiences with sport.

“Like I'm not athletic enough, especially on team sports. That's another thing that I think has prevented me from doing that before. This feeling like I'm gonna make the team lose and everyone's gonna be mad at me.” – Max (bisexual, nonbinary, white, fat)

In the previous quotation, Max shares how their previous experiences of bullying in sport continued to shape their experiences in the drop-in program leaving them feeling anxious and experiencing low self-worth. When they were asked, however, if these experiences impacted how they felt about the drop-in program, they shared how the program facilitators had supported them and left them feeling better about their participation.

“The other facilitator noticed that I had left for a while and was like, “hey, are you doing, OK?” [I told him] Yeah, I'm having a weird emotional response to this and then I was able to come back. But you know that the facilitators are making sure that everybody's OK and that they're checking [in].” -- Max (bisexual, nonbinary, white, fat)

Some of the 2SLGBTQ+ people of colour we spoke with identified the challenges of finding affirming 2SLGBTQ+ communities that were welcoming to people of colour within Kitchener-Waterloo and how this was sometimes the case for the drop-in program too. They shared how the few spaces that did exist for 2SLGBTQ+ people in the area often lacked racial or ethnic diversity, making them feel like they didn't belong. Arthur shared how while there were some sessions of the drop-in program that were well attended by other people of colour, other times

he was the only person to participate, which mirrored his experiences generally in many 2SLGBTQ+ spaces in the region.

“And there are some sessions though, where I'm like, there's a lot of POC here, and then there's other sessions where I'm like, oh, I'm the only one.” – Arthur (gay, cisgender man, Asian, 20's)

Despite this, none of the participants we interviewed felt discouraged from participating in the future. Some interviewees, like Layla, shared that she benefitted from the opportunity to be in community with other 2SLGBTQ+ people.

“Look, a lot of queer spaces can feel very white and but also sometimes anti-religion, but I didn't feel that way. The multi-sport thing because, there were a lot of people that didn't know each other at all, it just felt like people wanted community there and it felt good to be a part of that.” – Layla (cisgender woman, pansexual, Middle Eastern, 20's)

Concerns about *belonging* impacted other participants too. Rebecca shared that the first time that they came to the drop-in program, they were sitting in the parking lot for five minutes, debating whether to go in. When asked what their concern was, they explained:

“This is gonna sound very strange, I was like, I don't know if I'm queer enough to be in this space. I'm going through so much internally identifying myself in that sort of thing. I don't want to say the wrong thing. I don't wanna be that queer person that says something homophobic or something like that.” – Rebecca (genderfluid, lesbian, 30's)

Rebecca's concerns about offending others however dissipated and they would go on to describe their experience in the program as fun and relaxed.

Fostering belonging among participants who hold diverse identities in terms of gender, race, ability, and class (to name a few) was a priority for the facilitators. In this regard, Layla, Arthur and Rebecca said that the facilitators did an excellent job of fostering a sense of welcomeness for diverse 2SLGBTQ+ people and they could think of nothing more that they felt could be done. When asked how they helped to foster this sense of welcome, the facilitators shared how their check-in procedure served to set clear expectations about the program and welcome people.

“We have introductions at the beginning, so names, pronouns, and then we try and ask like a fun kind of icebreaker type questions, something that's not so serious but kind of gives people a bit of insight into who they are as a person. And my hope is that that week after week, asking questions like that, there's something that commonality that comes up.” – Keith (facilitator)

“So, warmups and introductions, finding ways to be silly, to be goofy, to break the ice a little bit, to allow people permission to also be silly or to not be so serious that it's not big scary sports time. It's we're here to be gay and flounce around as we try and hit the badminton.” – Kai (facilitator)

The facilitators used the check-ins at the start of each session to set a fun and relaxed tone. The check-ins also enabled the facilitators to get to know the participants and the participants had the chance to connect with one another. Some questions, such as one asking individuals to describe their mood if it were the weather offer insights into the participant's mood that day. At

times, when two activities were planned, a check-in question would be “if you had to pick between X or Y, what would you pick?”

In response to a question based on a comment from a participant interviewee (round 1 interviews) about some participants looking for opportunities to connect without talking about their emotional state, Keith discussed how the facilitators try to avoid asking an icebreaker question about an emotionally intense topic. Sample icebreaker questions are presented in the textbox.²⁰

Sample Icebreaker Questions

- If you had a superpower, what would it be?
- If your mood was the weather today, how would you describe it? Rainy? Sunny? Windy?
- What sport do you enjoy watching or playing the most?
- What's your favourite season to be outside?

Using a person's pronouns is critical to gender inclusion. At times, a program participant used an incorrect pronoun. Nat shared facilitator's responses in such situations.

“I think the best thing that we've kind of learned to do is you kind of reset and you sort of do this thing if you're noticing it's happening, you kind of go, alright, let's take a 5-minute water break. And before we do that, let's just introduce each other again, just to make sure we're using the right names and pronouns for people, and you don't single anyone out. If it continues to happen, you potentially have a conversation with the person who is maybe confused alone, outside of the program with everyone else and try to get a dialogue going that way.” – Nat (facilitator)

“We all go around and say our names and pronouns, and then after we say that there was just 20 people who shared their name and their pronouns and so I remind everyone like, “hey, you're probably not going to remember everyone's name or their pronouns but what we can do is ask and not assume. So, if you forget someone's name, you're gonna ask them, and then you might as well just ask them their pronouns, right?” And usually that's a nice way to break that tension because most of anyone who just shared their pronouns just put out an offering and they hope that it's gonna be received and that people are going to then see them for what they just shared. Who they are. By acknowledging the fact that people might forget or might fuck up, and we're going to say my bad, correct yourself and move on. Just kind of puts everyone on the same wavelength of like because this is what we can expect.” – Kai (facilitator)

Many participants, both trans and cisgender, shared how they appreciated the inclusion of stating their pronouns as part of their check-in process at the start of every session. In particular, trans participants described the check-in process as beneficial and affirming. Below, Amy shared how it allowed her to both practice speaking with new people, something she found difficult, and give her the opportunity to identify her gender without people guessing by how she presented on any given day.

“The pronouns at the start, going around the circle and answering a question, is good for me because it gets me talking for one thing, but then also it allows me a chance to convey my gender because for some people it's difficult. I get it, why it would be that they don't know

²⁰ With large groups (i.e., 15+), facilitators tended to use close-ended questions because of limited time, inviting participants to select from two or three options.

what my pronouns are, so it's nice to clear that error” – Amy (woman, transgender, omnisexual, white, 30’s)

Cisgender participants, like Catherine, reported that the check-in made them feel less concerned about misgendering other participants.

“It felt like a really nice mix of genders and obviously like a blur of gender. There were a lot of people using different pronouns, and I think for me there was a little bit of stress of, wanting to get pronouns correct because I’ve never been in a space where there was such a unique spread of pronouns and that it was a breath of fresh air to not make assumptions about any gender representation.” – Catherine (woman, queer, white)

Program Access and Challenges

We asked both program attendees and facilitators about factors that impacted the ability of people to access the drop-in program and if there were any general challenges experienced. Both program participants and facilitators identified issues with transit through the Kitchener-Waterloo region, particularly in winter. Transit passes, however, were seen by participants as one strategy to support program access.

“I live in [location removed to protect confidentiality], so I don’t have a car, so it was a little too far that that was mainly the reason I didn’t join.” – Mel (nonbinary, pansexual, Asian)

“I thought it was absolutely amazing that Spectrum provided bus passes for people.” – Rebecca (genderfluid, lesbian, 30’s)

In addition to addressing the cost of getting to the program, it is necessary to ensure program participants are safe accessing the community centre. Thus, as seen in the quotation below, without addressing poor lighting in the community centre parking lot or around the building, or far distances to walk to access transit, efforts to improve access by the program being no-fee and offering transit passes might be blunted.

“The Cambridge location is where there were many problems with running it in the winter that I kind of brought up to Scott [Spectrum Executive Director] and I’m like, it’s not a good location right now to go on a Tuesday night when it’s dark and there’s no lights and the transit stop is a long walk away. We’re setting up people to not come.” – Keith (Facilitator)

Facilitators were asked what strategies they used to address these conditions while also working within the program’s limited resources. Kai shared how, in response to concerns about safely entering the building, they stationed a facilitator to welcome participants and monitor for access needs.

“We did start doing that at the downtown Kitchener location where one of us [facilitators] is in the gym helping people sign in, check in and then the other person is in the hallway greeting people, right as they come in the doors.” – Kai (facilitator)

Kai would go on to explain that this might also benefit some participants (like Rebecca who shared that they had sat in their car feeling anxious) as it allowed participants to see a 2SLGBTQ+ person and engage with them one-on-one before entering the larger group.

Regarding other program issues, the facilitators mentioned a few notable issues, including difficulties to activity programming when few participants attended,²¹ the need for more equipment, and non-participants coming into the space wanting to join in (they would leave when told it was a closed group).

Reflections and Recommendations

- Drop-in sports programs represent an opportunity for 2SLGBTQ+ people to support their physical health and mental health and to build supportive social relationships with other 2SLGBTQ+ people.
- Among the program participants interviewed, many had negative past experiences with sports due to stigma based on their sexual and gender identities. For some participants this stigma intersected with other forms of marginalization such as fat-phobia. Despite these challenging histories, the program provided a safe space where participants could re-engage with sports in a supportive environment, fostering physical health, mental wellbeing, and social connectedness. As occurred during the pilot implementation, when triggered, drop-in program participants should be able to step away from the programming if they require time to process how they are feeling, and facilitators can check-in with the person. It is important that the facilitators be trained to check-in when a participant has a negative emotional experience.
- While program participants discussed physical and mental health benefits of the program, they especially highlighted its effectiveness in promoting social relationships within the 2SLGBTQ+ community, a critical factor given a shared sense of isolation for some participants. The structured yet inclusive approach to competition ensured that participants of varying skill levels felt comfortable and engaged, which was facilitated by the program's thoughtful planning and the facilitators' proactive strategies.
- Some challenges were documented, including regarding the inclusivity of the program for 2SLGBTQ+ people of colour. Some participants expressed that the program, like other local 2SLGBTQ+ spaces, occasionally lacked racial and ethnic diversity, which affected their sense of belonging. Additionally, issues with accessibility, particularly related to transit and winter weather, were noted as barriers to participation.
- Going forward, 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. Facilitators should be equipped to handle misgendering incidents sensitively and effectively, reinforcing the program's commitment to being a safe space for all participants. We also recommend the check-ins be kept general and "light", so they remain accessible to participants who do not want to engage in a lot of talking.

²¹ This tended to occur at the Kinbridge site. When the numbers of participants were low only one activity could be offered, generally a lower-skill activity to be inclusive of all attendees.

Reflections and Recommendations (continued)

- 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.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

In evaluating the drop-in program, we assessed its impact on participants’ outcomes and set out to understand their experiences in the program. To study its impact on program participants’ physical, mental, and social wellbeing, and engagement with group/team sports, we used two research designs: (1) quasi-experiential design involving pre- and post-program surveys with questions repeated in both surveys,²² and (2) retrospective feedback survey design in which questions asked participants for their subjective appraisal of the program’s impact on their outcomes. We discuss the designs further later in this report. To obtain an overall understanding of the program from participants’ perspectives, each survey included more than program outcomes, such as demographic questions in the pre-program survey and feedback questions about the facilitators in the post-program survey.

Concerning the evaluation of program outcomes, supplementing measuring outcomes related to the program’s goal of promoting participants’ physical, mental, and social wellbeing, informed by our analysis of the spring-summer 2023 interviews, we expanded the outcomes to include engagement with team/group sports. We added other questions based on these interviews, for example, the desire to be involved in a 2SLGBTQ+ activity that did not require a lot of talking, which is common in other support/community initiatives, such as 2SLGBTQ+ book clubs. As well, given growing anti-2SLGBTQ+ hatred in society, questions were included to understand the perceived benefits of the drop-in program as a safe space from societal trans/homophobia.

We administered surveys during the fall 2023 and winter 2024 program blocks, specifically, one when an individual joined the program (pre-program survey) and one at the end (post-program survey; fall 2023 block – December 2023; winter 2024 block – April 2024). Because program registration was open throughout each block, individuals could complete the pre-program survey at any time during the block. For individuals who participated in both blocks, they were invited to complete one pre-program survey and two post-program surveys (December 2023, April 2024).

What’s Ahead

Below we offer findings about who program participants were and why they joined the program, and the program’s effectiveness in meeting outcomes. Also, we present findings from the perspective of program participants related to the program’s operations, ranging from program promotion, the design of weekly sessions in terms of offering two sports, to engaging guest coaches and instructors.

²² To conduct analyses for the quasi-experiential design, participants’ responses across the pre-program and post-program surveys were matched using a participant code created by each participant combining the first two letters of their surname, the last two digits of their year of birth, and the first letters of their first name.

Methodological Note

Just over 200 individuals participated in the multi-sport drop-in program between April 2023 and March 2024. Because it was not possible to recruit a random sample for the evaluation of the multi-sport program given its drop-in nature, convenience sampling²³ was used including for the surveys. Across surveys, sample sizes range from 20 to 92. Convenience sampling does not necessarily produce a representative sample; therefore, our findings might not represent the outcomes, experiences and perceptions of all program participants. For example, the participant profile presented below might not reflect the actual details of the full group of program participants. Thus, we ask the reader to keep this in mind as you read the findings. Despite this methodological limitation, we believe the findings offer important insights into the program's effectiveness, strengths, and areas for improvement.

Findings

Program Participants: Who They Are and More

The pre-program survey included demographic questions and questions about one's level of physical exercise and involvement in group sports. It also included questions about one's motivations for joining the program and how they learned about it. Across the two pre-program surveys, 92 individuals completed a survey.

To provide insights about who program participants are and their experiences with physical exercise and sports, we share an overview of the survey participants' demographic characteristics and responses to sport-related questions. This is followed by information about the reasons why they joined the program and how they learned about it. These data provide insights about who the program is reaching.

Demographics. The average age of participants was 30 years old and ranged from 18 to 61 years old. As seen in Table 8, participants were diverse in many ways, including gender (50.6% trans and gender diverse), sexuality (71.6% asexual, bisexual, demisexual, pansexual, queer, questioning, Two-Spirit), race (35.3% racialized), class (47.6% working/lower class), and disability (30.4% disabled).

Exercise and group sports. When they joined the program, most individuals engaged in physical exercise that was individual oriented either occasionally (17.4%) or very frequently (47.8%). Half of the participants (50.0%) participated in group-based sport/fitness outside of the drop-in program, with 23.9% of these individuals indicating that at least some of these activities were 2SLGBTQ+ specific. Almost half of the participants (47.8%) participated in a group-based sport activity outside of the drop-in program within the past month.

²³ For the evaluation of the drop-in program, all program participants who expressed interest in joining the evaluation were invited to complete a survey.

Table 8: Demographics and Exercise and Group Sports (N = 92)

Demographics			
	N (%)		N (%)
Gender		Race/Ethnicity	
Cisgender man	23 (25.0)	White North American or European	55 (59.8)
Cisgender woman	17 (18.5)	Black North American, Caribbean, or African	5 (5.4)
Trans man/masculine	11 (12.0)	East, South, or Southeast Asian	10 (10.9)
Trans woman/feminine	6 (6.5)	First Nations, Inuit, Metis	1 (1.1)
Nonbinary	11 (12.0)	Latin American	3 (3.3)
Gender expansive ¹	12 (13.0)	Middle Eastern	2 (2.2)
Two-Spirit	1 (1.1)	Mixed Race	9 (9.8)
Prefer not to answer	11 (11.9)	Prefer not to answer	7 (7.6)
Sexual Orientation		Social Class	
Asexual	3 (3.3)	Upper class	2 (2.2)
Bisexual	13 (14.1)	Middle class	42 (45.7)
Demisexual	2 (2.2)	Working class	27 (29.3)
Gay	17 (18.5)	Lower class	13 (14.1)
Lesbian	6 (6.5)	Prefer not to answer	8 (8.7)
Pansexual	9 (9.8)	Highest Education Attainment	
Queer	27 (29.3)	High school diploma	14 (15.2)
Questioning	3 (3.3)	College diploma	11 (12.0)
Two-Spirit	1 (1.1)	Bachelor's degree	40 (43.5)
Heterosexual	3 (3.3)	Master's degree	10 (10.9)
Prefer not to answer	6 (6.5)	Professional degree	6 (6.5)
Disability		Doctorate degree	3 (3.3)
Yes ²	28 (30.4)	Prefer not to answer	8 (8.7)
No	53 (57.6)		
Prefer not to answer	11 (11.9)		
Exercise and Group Sports Participation			
	N (%)		N (%)
Participation in Individual-Oriented Exercise		2SLGBTQ+ Specific Group Sport/Fitness (N=46)	
Never	1 (1.1)	Yes	11 (23.9)
Very rarely	9 (9.8)	No	35 (76.1)
Rarely	5 (5.4)	Last Group Sport Outside of Drop-In Program	
Occasionally	16 (17.4)	Within the past month	22 (47.8)
Very frequently	44 (47.8)	Between 2-3 months ago	5 (10.9)
No response	17 (18.5)	Between 4-6 months ago	2 (4.3)
Participation in Group Sport Outside Drop-In Program		Between 7-12 months ago	7 (15.2)
Yes	46 (50.0)	Between 12-24 months ago	4 (8.7)
No	29 (31.5)	More than 2 years ago	6 (13.0)
No response	17 (18.5)		

¹ Includes trans, agender, genderfluid, and queer. ² Examples include mood disorder, neurodivergence or autism, hearing impairment, chronic illness, posttraumatic stress disorder, and physical challenges.

Reasons for Joining the Program

To examine motivations for joining the program, we invited participants to respond to 15 statements reflecting various reasons one might join the program using a 6-point scale (0 = strongly disagree, 1 = disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). A higher average score reflects stronger endorsement of the statement.

As displayed in Table 9, relatively high average scores (3.50 or greater) were seen for most of the statements. The highest score was for the statement, “To spend time with other 2SLGBTQ+ people.” Interestingly, the lowest score was for the general motivation, “Just to be physically active (i.e., it doesn’t really matter to me that it is a 2SLGBTQ+ dedicated space),” whereas the item, “To be physically active specifically in a space for 2SLGBTQ+ people” was strongly endorsed. Related to this, “Because I believe I can be myself as a 2SLGBTQ+ person in this program” was also highly endorsed.

In terms of wellness, the items related to physical and mental wellbeing were also highly supported, whereas those related to receiving social support for 2SLGBTQ+ discrimination and general challenges were less supported. The program being no cost was strongly endorsed.

Table 9: Motivations to Join the Drop-In Program (N = 74 – 75)

Motivation	Mean (SD)	Motivation	Mean (SD)
To be physically active specifically in a space for 2SLGBTQ+ people.	4.13 (1.03)	Because I enjoy being involved in group sport generally.	3.24 (1.25)
Just to be physically active (i.e., it doesn’t really matter to me that it is a 2SLGBTQ+ dedicated space).	2.45 (1.47)	Because being 2SLGBTQ+ and joining 2SLGBTQ+ specific activities are important to me.	3.88 (1.13)
To meet other 2SLGBTQ+ people to expand my social circle.	4.08 (1.01)	Because I believe I can be myself as a 2SLGBTQ+ person in this program.	4.15 (1.06)
To spend time with other 2SLGBTQ+ people.	4.25 (0.81)	To meet people who I can talk with when I experience 2SLGBTQ+ discrimination.	3.32 (1.50)
To deal with stress in my life.	3.75 (1.07)	To meet people who I can talk with when I experience general challenges in life (i.e., issues not related to being 2SLGBTQ+).	3.05 (1.34)
To get healthier in terms of my physical health.	3.87 (1.12)		
To improve my overall mental health.	3.97 (0.94)		
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).	2.97 (1.63)	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	2.87 (1.52)
		Because there is no cost associated with participating in the program.	4.16 (1.12)

Reflections and Recommendations

- The gender, racial, class, and ability diversity of the program's participants are noteworthy strengths and suggest the program is accessible to groups that are often excluded from traditional 2SLGBTQ+ spaces. Promotional campaigns reflecting the diversity of participants, such as group photos of drop-in participants coupled with participants' positive experiences in the program (discussed in the previous qualitative findings and below in other quantitative findings) likely contribute to these strengths. Current promotional activities and facilitation practices should be continued by Spectrum and replicated by other organizations seeking to implement a 2SLGBTQ+ multi-sport drop-in program.
- Spectrum's program seems to attract individuals who are physically active, including some involved in team sports. Thus, campaigns to reach those who are not already physically active should be considered.
- Aligned with the findings about participants' motivations for joining the program, promotional and outreach campaigns should emphasize the opportunity to have fun and play sports in a 2SLGBTQ+ safe space, while also fostering participants' health and wellbeing. The free nature of the program can also be referenced.

Program Outcomes: Is the Program Making a Difference?

As previously mentioned, in evaluating the program's effectiveness in improving participants' physical, mental, and social wellbeing, and strengthening their engagement with group/team sports, we implemented a quasi-experiential research study and conducted a retrospective feedback survey.

Underlying quasi-experiential research is the assumption that if the program is effective, improved outcomes would be documented at the end of the program (post-program survey) compared to at its start (pre-program survey). While this design does not enable us to address other factors that might affect participants' wellbeing and engagement with group sports, such as positive or negative factors or events in their lives, it is considered more robust than one's subjective appraisal of program impact. However, we believe both designs offer important insights about the program's effectiveness.

Quasi-experiential design: Program outcomes

For the quasi-experiential design, survey scales addressing program outcomes were repeated across the pre-program and post-program surveys. For these scales, we used a combination of existing scales, adaptations of existing scales, and questions we created. In Table 10 we describe each scale. Except for the Patient Health Questionnaire 4 (PHQ-4) and stress, all scales were scored so that a higher score indicates greater wellbeing or engagement in group sports.

Table 10: Survey Measures used for the Quasi-Experiential Evaluation of Program Outcomes

Domain	Indicator	Scale/Description	Source
Physical Wellbeing	Overall health	Single question assessing subjective health	Canadian Community Health Survey-General Health Module
	Physical activity satisfaction	Single question assessing satisfaction with one's level of physical activity	Created by evaluation team
	Eating habits satisfaction	Single question assessing satisfaction with one's eating habits	Created by evaluation team
Mental Wellbeing	Distress	Patient Health Questionnaire 4 (PHQ-4); 4 questions assessing symptoms of anxiety and depression experienced in the past two weeks; composite score reported	Kroenke, Spitzer, Williams, & Löwe, 2009 ²⁴
	Overall mental health	Single question assessing subjective mental health	Canadian Community Health Survey-General Health Module ²⁵
	Stress	Single question assessing subjective stress	Canadian Community Health Survey-General Health Module
	Life satisfaction	Single question assessing satisfaction with one's life currently	Canadian Community Health Survey-General Health Module
Social Wellbeing	Belonging to 2SLGBTQ+ community	Single question assessing one's sense of belonging to the local 2SLGBTQ+ community	Adapted from Canadian Community Health Survey-General Health Module
	Connectedness to 2SLGBTQ+ community	Two questions assessing one's perception of being a part of and bond with the local 2SLGBTQ+ community; composite score reported	Adapted from Connectedness to the LGBT Community Scale ²⁶
	Social support	Single question assessing the number of people one can count on for support	Adapted from Sex Now ²⁷

²⁴ Kroenke, K., Spitzer, R. L., Williams, J. B., & Löwe, B. (2009). An ultra-brief screening scale for anxiety and depression: The PHQ-4. *Psychosomatics*, 50(6), 613–621. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.psy.50.6.613>

²⁵ Canadian Community Health Survey. Statistics Canada. <https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvInstrumentList&Id=1531795>

²⁶ Frost, D. M., & Meyer, I. H. (2012). Measuring community connectedness among diverse sexual minority populations. *Journal of Sex Research*, 49(1), 36-49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2011.565427>

²⁷ Sex Now Questionnaire: 2014, Community Based Research Centre, Vancouver, BC. https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/cbrcc/pages/2040/attachments/original/1636999951/Sex_Now_Questionnaire_2014.pdf?1636999951

Table 10 Continued

Domain	Indicator	Scale/Description	Source
Engaging in Group Sports	Comfort with group sports	Single question assessing one's comfort playing group sports	Created by evaluation team
	Competence playing group sports	Single question assessing one's sense of competency playing groups sports	Created by evaluation team

For the fall 2023 block, we matched responses for 20 participants across the pre- and post-surveys. We matched responses for 32 participants for the winter 2024 block. Given this latter group is larger, we present findings utilizing the second sample of matched data. In terms of demographics, participants in this sample were diverse in terms of gender (11 trans and gender diverse, 17 cisgender) and race (12 racialized, 20 white).

To analyze responses across the pre- and post-program surveys, given the small sample size we conducted a series of Wilcoxon Signed Rank tests. This test determines if there is a statically significant difference between the average (mean) score between the pre- and post-surveys. When statistically significant differences are found, to give an indication of how meaningful the difference between two mean scores is, we report the effect size.²⁸

In addition to analyzing responses for all 32 participants, given possible differences in outcomes based on gender and race, we also conducted an analysis within gender groups (cisgender/trans and gender diverse [TGD]) and racial groups (white/racialized). Given the particularly small samples for the subgroup analyses, we use caution in interpreting these results.

Tables reporting the statistical findings are found in Appendix A. Below, we report the results in narrative form.

Physical wellbeing

Overall health. Across all participants and among cisgender, TGD, and white subgroups, though higher mean scores were found at the program's end suggesting improved health, the differences were not statistically significant. In contrast, there was a statistically significant difference in scores for racialized participants with higher scores at the program's end, reflecting improved subjective physical health. A medium-large positive effect size was observed for this group.

Physical activity satisfaction. No statistically significant differences were observed for any of the analyses. Interestingly, compared to the pre-program scores, as expected mean scores were higher at the program's end among the full group of participants and white and racialized subgroups, but were lower at the end of the program for the gender subgroups.

Eating habits satisfaction. Across all analyses the mean scores were higher at the program end, suggesting improved eating habits, with statistically significant findings among racialized participants, with a large positive effect size.

²⁸ For effect size, 0.10, 0.30, and 0.50 indicate small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively.

Mental wellbeing

Distress. Among participants overall, there was a statistically significant difference across pre- and post-surveys for the PHQ-4 scores, with a lower score at the program's end indicating improved mental health in terms of distress, with a medium-large negative effect size.

Additionally, we found statistically significant differences (decrease) in PHQ-4 scores for cisgender participants, TGD participants, and white participants from the start of the program to its conclusion, also indicating better mental health at the program's end for these participants; a medium-large negative effect size was observed for each group. In contrast, although mean scores were lower at the program's end compared to its start for racialized participants, the difference was not statistically significant.

Overall mental health. There was a statistically significant difference in subjective mental health scores among the participants overall from the program's start to its end, with a higher mean at the end suggesting improved mental health. A small-medium positive effect size was observed. No statistically significant differences were seen among the gender and racial subgroups although mean scores were higher at the program's conclusion compared to its start.

Stress. While stress scores were lower at the program's conclusion than at its start, differences were not statistically significant for the participants overall and cisgender, TGD, and white subgroups. In contrast, a statistically significant difference was observed in stress scores among racialized participants with a lower mean score at the end, indicating lower subjective stress. A medium-large negative effect size was observed.

Satisfaction with life. Although all mean scores were higher at the end of the program for the participants overall and the subgroups analyses, suggesting greater life satisfaction, the differences were not statistically significant.

Social wellbeing

Belonging to the local 2SLGBTQ+ community. Interestingly, mean scores remained the same for some groups (participants overall, white), increased for others (cisgender), and decreased for other groups (TGD, racialized). No statistically significant results were found.

Connectedness to the local 2SLGBTQ+ community. Suggesting greater community connectedness at the program's end, compared to the pre-survey results mean scores were higher for the post-program survey program among the full group and among cisgender and white subgroups with statistically significant results and large positive effect sizes. A slight increase in the average scores was seen among racialized participants and a slight decrease was seen among TGD participants (suggesting lower connectedness), but these findings were not statistically significant.

Social support. While all mean scores for the number of people one could count on for support were higher for each analysis at the program's end, suggesting more people one could rely on, none of the differences were statistically significant.

Engaging in group sports

Comfort playing group sports. Across all our analyses mean scores were higher for the post-program survey, suggesting participants felt more comfortable playing group sports at the program's conclusion. Significant differences were only found for participants overall, TGD participants, and white participants with medium positive to medium-large positive effect sizes observed.

Competency playing group sports. Except for TGD participants, higher scores were reported at the end of the program, suggesting greater competence playing group sports. The only statistically significant difference was found for the participants overall, with a small-medium positive effect size.

Program impacts: Retrospective feedback

All individuals who expressed interest in joining the evaluation project were invited to complete the two post-surveys (December 2023, April 2024), which included questions asking them to retrospectively assess the program’s impact in terms potential benefits on physical, mental, and social wellbeing, and engagement in sport. Participants used a 6-point scale (0 = strongly disagree, 1 = disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) to indicate their level of agreement with each statement addressing potential program benefits. Each statement began with the phrase, “By participating in the program” followed by a proposed benefit. A higher average score indicates overall greater perceived benefit.

In addition to questions related to these outcomes, we included three other questions asking for feedback on the value of the program in the context of growing anti-2SLGBTQ+ hatred in society, with one question concerning mental wellbeing and the other two being social wellbeing/social support. These questions used the same 6-point scale as the general feedback questions, but started with the phrase, “Considering the increase of anti-2SLGBTQ+ hatred in society, such as protests against gender inclusive school curriculum...”

Twenty individuals completed these questions in the December 2023 survey and 49 completed them in the April 2024 survey. For conciseness, we only present findings from the larger sample (April 2024), though we did note any noteworthy differences between the average scores across the two surveys.

As shown in Table 11, with few exceptions, average scores were relatively high, with four scores ranging between 4.00 (“agree”) and 5 (“strongly agree”). These include items concerning overall mental health and three items addressing the program’s value in the context of growing anti-2SLGBTQ+ hatred in society. Six items across the four domains had average scores in the 3.00 – 3.99 range, also representing a positive assessment. Lowest scores were for items concerning social support, namely meeting other 2SLGBTQ+ people to talk with when stressed and meeting others 2SLGBTQ+ people who one now views as friends. When rounded up, these average scores reflect “somewhat agree.”

Race and Gender

Given that race and gender might shape one’s perceptions of the program’s impacts, we conducted an analysis comparing responses based on race (racialized, white) and gender (TGD, cisgender). No statistically significant differences were identified.

Table 11: Perceived Benefits Related to Program Outcomes

Domain	Variable	Mean (SD)
Physical Wellbeing	Physically healthier	3.47 (1.00)
Mental Wellbeing	Overall mental health has benefitted	4.02 (0.75)
	Better deal with stress	3.53 (0.87)
	<i>Related to growing anti-2SLGBTQ+ hatred in society</i> Mental health/psychological wellbeing has benefitted from having the drop-in program as a safe space	4.47 (0.68)
Social Wellbeing	Expanded my 2SLGBTQ+ social circle	3.45 (1.19)
	Met other 2SLGBTQ+ people I can talk with when stressed	2.73 (1.30)
	Met other 2SLGBTQ+ people I can talk with when facing 2SLGBTQ+ discrimination	3.33 (1.20)
	Met other 2SLGBTQ+ people I now consider to be friends	2.84 (1.42)
	<i>Related to growing anti-2SLGBTQ+ hatred in society</i> Appreciate having the drop-in program as a safe space	4.71 (0.54)
	Sense of belonging in the larger community/society has benefitted from having the drop-in program as a safe space	4.67 (0.56)
Engagement in Sport	Improved sport abilities	3.78 (0.84)
	More comfortable joining group sports as a 2SLGBTQ+ person	3.76 (1.09)

Reflections and Recommendations

- In the matched data analysis for the quasi-experimental evaluation, many of the mean scores across analyses changed in the desired direction (e.g., lower for distress, higher for community connectedness), suggesting the program is effective. However, few of the changes in scores were statistically significant, which can be because of the small sample size. Also, in some cases, such as stress it is possible that while the program might help reduce feelings of stress while participating in weekly program sessions (a theme in the qualitative findings), it might not affect one’s overall stress levels. For other indicators, like social support, the program itself might not necessarily translate into changes central to the quantitative measure we used (i.e., number of people one can count on when needed) but might contribute to other important social outcomes, such as community belonging. Findings from the retrospective feedback about program outcomes, namely the item about meeting other people who one can talk to when stressed (lowest mean score) and the item about sense of belonging, one of the highest means scores (second highest mean score) support this possibility.
- With these concerns in mind, it is noteworthy that based on our analysis of the matched data among the full sample and the statistically significant findings, the program is effective in many ways including in improving aspects of mental wellbeing (distress, mental health overall) and promoting connectedness with the local 2SLGBTQ+ community. We also found statistical significance for the difference in distress scores among cisgender, TGD, and white participants. Similarly, statistically significant differences in connectedness scores were found among cisgender and white subgroups.

Reflections and Recommendations (continued)

- Findings for the retrospective assessment of the program’s impact suggest the program is beneficial, especially as a safe space from growing anti-2SLGBTQ+ hatred in society. These findings also indicate it is helpful for participants’ mental health overall, building connections with 2SLGBTQ+ people, and increased engagement in sports and group sports.
- When Spectrum promotes the program to future cohorts or other organizations wanting to offer a similar program, we recommend that the documented benefits of the program be integrated into recruitment campaigns.

Program Operations

Program promotion. Based on responses from the pre-program survey ($N = 92$), Instagram (44.6%) was the most popular way that individuals learned about the drop-in program followed by friend/acquaintance (34.8%) and Spectrum’s website (25.0%).

Transit passes. The post-program surveys (December 2023, April 2024) asked participants if they accessed the free transit passes available through the program. In the December 2023 survey, five individuals indicated they accessed the passes and eight reported doing so in the April 2024 survey. Among these individuals, in the December survey two of the five individuals reported they could not participate in the program without the transit pass and three indicated they would have to participate less often if the passes were not available. For the April 2024 survey, six of the eight individuals stated they would not be able to join the program without the passes, and five of the eight people reported they would attend fewer sessions without the passes.

Reflections and Recommendations

- Given the popularity of social media, especially Instagram, it is not surprising that most participants heard about the program through this platform. Spectrum promoted the program in many ways, which we recommend continue. However, given the reach of Instagram posts, it is especially worthwhile to continue to use this platform.
- Though uptake of the free transit passes by survey respondents was minimal, the findings indicate that they would not be able to join the program, or their participation would be reduced without the passes. Therefore, Spectrum should continue to offer free passes as should other organizations implementing a similar program.

Program Inclusion, Program Design, Program Facilitators, and Guest Coaches

As part of the post-surveys, we included questions exploring participants’ experiences of inclusion in the program, generally and perceptions of the facilitators fostering one’s inclusion related to program participants’ differing sport abilities and their social identities. We intentionally asked questions about inclusion generally in the program given that a person’s experiences are shaped by interactions with other participants and not only the facilitators. Because the facilitators play a primary role in selecting the activities played each week, we

included items about creating inclusive spaces given one's sport comfort and confidence levels and identities. Questions about program design in terms of offering two different activities of various ability levels were asked, including one about continuing this practice in the future.

Considering that using correct pronouns is a critical element to creating inclusive spaces for gender diverse participants, we also inquired about the facilitators' engagement in inclusive pronoun practices, including apologizing and correcting themselves when an incorrect pronoun was used.

With respect to the guest coaches/instructors, we asked participants if they attended at least one session with a guest coach/instructions, and among those who did we asked follow-up questions about the guest coaches/instructors making the program interesting, the environment they created for participants in terms of competitiveness and pressure to perform well, and if the program should continue to involve guest coaches/instructors.

All these questions used the same response options as the retrospective feedback questions above (0 = strongly disagree, 1 = disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) with higher average scores reflecting more positive feedback. For select questions, we report percentages, grouping "strongly disagree," "disagree," and "somewhat disagree" together under the title of disagree, and grouping "somewhat agree," "agree," and "strongly agree" under the title of agree.

Like the previous analysis, given more individuals participated in the April 2024 survey than the December 2023 survey, and no notable differences between responses were identified, we report findings from the April 2024 survey ($N = 49$, unless otherwise indicated).

Inclusion Generally and Inclusion Fostered by the Facilitators

With respect to perceptions of inclusion in the program generally, the mean scores (all above 4.00) suggest the program was very inclusive in terms of participants being able to be oneself as a 2SLGBTQ+ person in general, but also considering one's gender, sexuality, and other minority identities. Likewise, participants perceived the facilitators as being highly effective in fostering inclusion as suggested by the mean scores all being above 4.00. This includes items addressing the facilitators creating inclusive spaces given participants' comfort and confidence levels with sports as well as their identities. See Table 12 for more information.

Regarding the facilitators' use of pronouns, a notable number of participants selected "I Don't Know/ Didn't Notice" for both of our questions. Nonetheless, other participants reported that the facilitators "often" or "always" ($n = 33$, 68.7%) tried to "use my/other participants' pronouns or when incorrect pronouns were used apologized and corrected themselves ($n = 15$, 31.3% selected "I Don't Know/ Didn't Notice"). And when an incorrect pronoun was used, participants reported that the facilitators tended to apologize and correct themselves "often" or "always" ($n = 22$, 44.9%; $n = 27$, 55.1% selected "I Don't Know/ Didn't Notice").

Table 12: Feedback about Program Inclusiveness (N = 49)

Variable	Mean (SD)
Domain: General Program Inclusion	
The program gave me the opportunity to be myself as a 2SLGBTQ+ person.	4.47 (0.62)
Given my gender, I felt safe/comfortable participating in the program.	4.61 (0.61)
Given my sexuality, I felt safe/comfortable participating in the program.	4.65 (0.48)
As a 2SLGBTQ+ person who holds other diverse minority identities (e.g., Black, Indigenous, Person of Colour, religious minority, lives with disability), I felt safe/comfortable participating in the program. (N = 23)	4.30 (0.88)
Domain: Facilitators	
Feel comfortable engaging in sport given my level of ability with sports	4.59 (0.86)
Feel comfortable engaging in sport given my level of confidence with sports	4.57 (0.84)
Allowed me to be myself	4.63 (0.81)
Given my gender the facilitator made me feel comfortable	4.59 (0.81)
Given my sexuality the facilitator made me feel comfortable	4.63 (0.81)
Feel comfortable as a 2SLGBTQ+ person who holds other diverse minority identities (e.g., Black, Indigenous, Person of Colour, religious minority, lives with disability) (N = 21)	4.62 (0.59)
Created an appropriate level of competitiveness among program participants in terms of our ability to play particular sports	4.02 (1.52)
Created a comfortable level of pressure for me to play the sport/perform the activity really well	4.18 (1.51)

Reflections and Recommendations

- These survey findings align with the positive experiences participants shared in the qualitative interviews. Given the exclusion of TGD participants in many queer spaces, findings related to gender inclusion and facilitators' common use of inclusive language practices in terms of pronouns are particularly noteworthy. Further, strategies such as employing racialized facilitators are helpful in fostering inclusion for racialized program participants.
- The findings suggest that the strategies used by the facilitators (discussed in the program background and qualitative results) to create an inclusive space in terms of participants' differing sport abilities are making a positive impact. These should be continued and adopted when other organizations create similar sport programs.

Program Design – Different Activities Weekly

As the following findings suggest, with few exceptions participants endorsed offering two different sports each week, which encouraged many to attend. For most participants, playing high intensity sports encouraged them to return to the program. All participants recommended publicizing what sports would be played in advance.

Table 13: (N = 36 – 37)²⁹

Survey Question	Disagree N (%)	Agree N (%)	NA N (%)
I liked that I could choose between these two different sports each week.	-	37 (100)	-
Knowing we'd play the same low intensity sport each week encouraged me to come back to the drop-in program the following week or as soon as I could.	1 (2.8)	21 (58.3)	14 (38.9)
Knowing we'd play different high intensity sports each week encouraged me to come back to the drop-in program the following week or as soon as I could.	2 (5.6)	32 (88.9)	2 (5.6)
Knowing what sports would be played each week often helped me to determine if I would attend or not.	2 (5.6)	34 (77.4)	1 (2.7)
I recommend that future offerings publicize a few days before the drop-in session the sports that will be played to help people decide if they want to attend or not.	-	36 (100)	-

Program Design – Guest Coaches/Instructors

Among the participants in the April 2024 survey, 34 (69.4%) participated in at least one session where there was a guest coach or instructor. Among these 34 individuals, the majority ($n = 29$, 85.3) agreed³⁰ that “Knowing that guest coaches/instructors would be leading particular sports or activities made me more interested in the program.” Likewise, among the 32 people who answered the next question, the majority ($n = 27$, 87.5%) indicated that the inclusion of guest coaches/instructors helped to maintain their interest in the program.

With respect to the environment created by the guest coaches/instructors, among the 34 people who answered the questions addressing this, the vast majority indicated that coaches/instructors created an inclusive environment in terms of the level of competitiveness ($n = 31$, 91.2%) and “pressure to play/perform really well” ($n = 31$, 91.2%). Finally, all participants who answered our final question about guest coaches/instructors ($n = 33$) reported that the program should continue to engage guest coaches/instructors.

²⁹ Participants selected from “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “somewhat disagree,” “somewhat agree,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.” Questions 2 and 3 included “Not applicable – I tended to join the higher intensity activity” as an option, and question 4 included “Not applicable – I did not see the information online” as an option. In the table, disagree includes responses for “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” and “somewhat disagree,” and agree includes responses for “somewhat agree,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.”

³⁰ Participants selected either “somewhat agree,” “agree,” or “strongly agree.”

Reflections and Recommendations

- It is not surprising that the participants valued having two activities offered at weekly sessions. It is recommended to continue this practice and to advertise the sports in advance. However, offering two activities is impossible when groups are small, which can occur in a drop-in program.
- Considering the positive feedback about the involvement of guest coaches/instructors, this practice should continue. In one of the interviews conducted spring-summer 2023, a participant discussed how a guest coach seemed to have high expectations about how well participants would engage with the sport/activity, but our quantitative findings do not support this. Nonetheless, it is recommended that program facilitators continue to orient guest coaches and instructors to the purpose and general “let’s have fun and exercise” nature of the program.

IMPLEMENTING THE MULTI-SPORT DROP-IN PROGRAM ELSEWHERE

In addition to the reflections and recommendations outlined above that can shape the implementation of a 2SLGBTQ+ multi-sport program in other communities, we offer the following reflections to the question: How can 2SLGBTQ+ multi-sport programming be structured and delivered in a manner that is suitable and sustainable in other locations with a similar population as Waterloo Region or smaller?

Program Host/Lead: Spectrum offers a range of support and recreational programs and had already implemented the drop-in program prior to the Sport Canada grant. Underpinning the program was an unwavering commitment to ensuring the program was fun and accessible and inclusive to individuals with a range of sport abilities and identities, especially in terms of race, gender, and class. It is essential that other organizations hosting a similar program, and its coordinator and facilitators understand and embrace its goals, and ensure all participants are welcomed. Spectrum and the program’s coordinator and facilitators were dedicated to ensuring the program remained relaxed and fun, but also responsive to participants’ needs. The facilitators welcomed and responded to informal feedback outside of the project evaluation.

Partnership: Partner with local city recreation department or a sport facility that is open to hosting the program and working with the sponsoring 2SLGBTQ+ organization to ensure the program’s effective implementation. and the recreation facility is welcoming for 2SLGBTQ+ participants. Even though Spectrum recruited and employed the facilitators for its drop-in program, the recreation department/host facility needs to be committed to fostering a safe and inclusive space for 2SLGBTQ+ people. While such commitments are common in organizational mission statements, it must be operationalized through policy, practice, and staff training. For instance, do organizational anti-discrimination policies enumerate gender and sexual

orientation? Are there accessible procedures in place when trans/bi/homophobia occurs? Do staff and volunteers understand the issues facing 2SLGBTQ+ people? Do they understand how to foster an inclusive space? Do they know how to intervene when an anti-2SLGBTQ+ incident occurs? If the answer is no to any of these questions, can 2SLGBTQ+ diversity training be provided to staff? Can the principles and practices of 2SLGBTQ+ service provision be addressed in supervision and performance review processes?

With respect to facilities, do gender-inclusive restrooms and changerooms exist? If not, how can existing spaces be made more inclusive in the short-term while a 2SLGBTQ+ drop-in program is running (e.g., make single user restroom inclusive and post a sign indicating so) and in the long-term? Likewise, in terms of facilities, is there adequate external lighting for evening programming? If not, should an alternate space or time be selected, or could some sort of buddy system be implemented to ensure that the participants get to their vehicles or public transportation safely?

In developing the drop-in program, the two organizations will need to work together on when is the best time to schedule the program. Are there particular days or times of the day when the facility is less busy that would be accessible to members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community? For Spectrum's program, times varied across the three sites: Saturday early afternoon, Saturday late afternoon, and Tuesday evening.

Program Facilitators: Spectrum's program facilitators were from the 2SLGBTQ+ community and represented the community's diversity, which meant program participants, including trans and gender diverse participants and racialized participants could see themselves represented among the facilitators. Having a diverse team of 2SLGBTQ+ facilitators is critically important. There was a primary facilitator (also acted as program coordinator) who oversaw and supported the co-facilitators, who had been program participants previously. The primary facilitator possessed strong instructor, coaching, and interpersonal skills and trained and supported the other facilitators and was able to support the program's overall implementation. They also had experience in physical and mental health support. This experience is critical for leading the program in a safe way (e.g., mitigating the risk of injuries, responding competently to distress). All facilitators should have physical and mental health support knowledge and skills.

All program staff were paid, which promoted a consistent program experience and enabled the recruitment of facilitators with diverse identities who might not have been able to be co-facilitators if the role was voluntary. Before starting as facilitators, they engaged in a common onboarding process which included participating in training in accessibility, health and safety, and anti-racism, as well as Spectrum's Rainbow Diversity Training. The training provided an important foundation for the program's success and should be replicated by other organizations implementing a drop-in program. Having professional coaching experience or credentials was not a requirement to be a facilitator, though it was an asset that some of Spectrum's facilitators held. Future iterations of the drop-in program would benefit from ensuring at least one facilitator has a background in coaching, and facilitators without such experience participate in coaching workshops to build their confidence. As well, a strong primary facilitator is recommended to help grow co-facilitators' skills, when they are less experienced.³¹

³¹ For Spectrum's program, only one of the facilitators had more sports experience overall. Collectively, the facilitators gained experience as program participants and in the co-facilitator role. The facilitators focused on creating an inclusive space first, and sometimes asked participants to share their skills or explain the rules of particular sports when the facilitator was not overly confident in the sport.

Central to the facilitators' success was that as members of the local 2SLGBTQ+ community, they understood and firmly believed in the program's goals and values, they were open to learning, and most importantly they were able to create an inclusive program. Engaging guest coaches and instructors is a highly valued component of the program. The coordinator and facilitators need to be able to help the guest coaches and instructors understand the program's goals and nature and help the guest coach or instructor create an accessible activity given the group's abilities and interests.

Finally, given the drop-in nature of the program and the fact that the number of participants could vary each week the facilitators need to be flexible when it comes to planning which sports will be played and be able to lead a wide array of sports. For example, they might plan to play dodgeball, but if too small a group of participants attend that day, an alternate activity for a smaller group will need to be played.

Program Coordination: Successfully implementing a multi-sport drop-in program requires a dedicated and skilled coordinator. Spectrum hired a Sports Coordinator who worked approximately 16 hours per week on program promotion, recruitment, and registration, and recruited guest coaches and instructors (and as noted, was the primary facilitator). A comprehensive participant recruitment strategy is needed, which can include outreach to key groups, such as groups for 2SLGBTQ+ people of colour. Further, implementing a drop-in program in which new participants join weekly can be challenging given its open-ended nature, thus a coordinator needs to oversee registration, including answering inquiries. To ensure the program is responsive to participants' needs, participant feedback is important. Spectrum's coordinator developed a feedback tool, reviewed participants' comments and suggestions, identified program changes, and worked with the facilitators to implement the changes to ensure the program continued to meet the community's evolving needs.

Given the array of duties, the coordinator must have strong organizational and administrative skills. As a program leader, they must also have a strong background in equity, diversity, and inclusion, and possessing community engagement skills.

As noted, Spectrum's program coordinator was also the primary facilitator. While the combined roles were beneficial for this drop-in program, it might be possible to operate the program with separate individuals working as the coordinator and primary facilitator, assuming there is strong collaboration between them.

Creating a Successful Drop-In Program from a Group Facilitation Perspective

Given the critical role that facilitation played in the success of Spectrum's multi-sport drop-in program, to help other organizations interested in offering a similar program in their community, we offer the following reflections about the drop-in program's facilitation across the forming, growing, and established group development phases. The phases address an increase in the number of participants and the development of a core group of participants over time, as well as the facilitator's role and priorities at each phase. These points were developed by Troy Dettwiler, Sports Coordinator.

Forming: At this stage, the number of participants was generally low, so there was considerable dialogue with participants at each session on what they would like to do for that session. For example, if four participants attended a session, the conversation generally entailed: "Hey folks, we were hoping to play basketball today, but we don't have enough people. We could either play some fun shooting games or we could pivot to another sport like pickleball. What would you like to do?" It was important the facilitators remain positive, even with small numbers, and play the sport themselves. It was important the facilitators consider everyone's individual ability to ensure a safe playing environment. At this stage, it was critical that the facilitators focus on individual needs and build participants' comfort in the program over following a larger plan.

Growing: In this stage, the number of participants allowed more team-based sports, but there still was not necessarily a consistent number of regular participants. At this stage, the facilitators proactively planned sports, instead of working collaboratively with participants on the spot. This was necessary to ensure two activities of differing skill and comfort levels were available. Often a third sport would be offered during the second half of the session that everyone could join. For example: pickleball and volleyball would run simultaneously, followed by a small game, such as relay races or basketball shooting games like Bump or Twenty-one. In some cases, one court had an inadequate number of players. When this happened, the facilitators would run one activity, the one involving the lowest ability which fostered accessibility and inclusion in the activity. The facilitator would explain changes to participants, for instance: "Looks like we don't have enough people for x today, but I know we have a few people that are not interested in y. We're going to focus on playing z today so that everyone can feel included. If we have more people coming next week, we'll play x, so bring your friends!" At this stage, it was important to plan activities to address the growing number of participants and offer various sports across the sessions, but still being flexible as the number of participants varied from week to week.

Established: During this stage, there were enough participants to sustain a variety of sports reflecting various skill and comfort levels as a core group of participants attended weekly. However, given new participants also joined sessions, the facilitators needed to be concerned new participants were integrated into the space and cliques did not form. The facilitators were playing the sports less compared to the previous stage and focused more on supervision and ensuring safety with the larger numbers. At this stage, following pre-scheduled sports created a predictable environment which reduced anxiety for some participants. As well, the facilitator would introduce the two activities and invite individuals to possibly join both during the session by saying something like, "Hey folks, today we are playing volleyball over here, and pickleball on the other court. If you want to move between the sports, that's fine! Just let us know if you want to join a volleyball game. On the pickleball side, we'll have a court focused on skill building for new participants - and the other court can be for our regulars to get right

into a game. On the volleyball side, we will work on drills to build your confidence and then get into a game. If you have any questions, just let one of the facilitators know!”

In summary, for organizations and groups wanting to implement a 2SLGBTQ+ drop-in program, across the three stages, facilitators need to consider the number of participants, including repeat and new participants, and their skill level.

Forming Stage

- Low number of participants: Focus on individual needs and interests, offer activities that can be played by a small group of participants with differing sport skills and comfort levels (e.g., pickleball, badminton, or basketball shooting exercises); the facilitators play the selected sports.
- Adaptability: Be flexible and adjust activities based on participants’ preferences.

Growing Stage

- Increasing number of participants: Introduce and plan for more team-based sports of differing skill/comfort levels while maintaining flexibility; facilitators join the sports less often than the previous stage.
- Clear Instructions: Provide explicit instructions about the selected activities, including speaking to the differing sport skills levels involved.

Establishing Stage

- Consistent participation by a core group of individuals: Follow a pre-determined schedule of sports to create a predictable environment for participants; continue to offer activities of differing skill/comfort levels.
- Community building and safety: Facilitators focus on integrating new participants and preventing the formation of cliques and provide clear instructions while managing participants to ensure the safety of all given the larger group size.