



WELLESLEY INSTITUTE
advancing urban health

Enabling Grant Research Report

Building School Inclusiveness

Introduction

The project has assembled an interdisciplinary team of academic researchers and a wide range of community partners to explore two core questions: what policies and practices will make Canadian schools more inclusive of sexual diversity among their students; and what strategies are most likely to be effective in getting schools to change.

Project Review

Our activities centred on: conducting a series of focus groups with young people in a range of Toronto settings, to determine what their priorities were, and what supports and information would be most useful to them; exploring a variety of community partner relationships; developing a network of university-based researchers; and developing a more focused and manageable research agenda. We succeeded on these fronts, finding that the priorities advanced by youth overlapped considerably with the interests of the academics who became part of our network. That network ended up extending to Ryerson University, York University, McMaster University, the University of Windsor, the University of Regina, and the University of Alberta. The community groups signing on as partners include Supporting Our Youth, the LGB Youth Line, The 519 Church Street Community Centre, as well as the Toronto District School Board and (to date) two teacher unions).

When we began, the project envisaged looking quite broadly at the challenges facing LGBT youth. The questions posed at the outset included education, but there was no reason to anticipate that it would focus on schools. That focus emerged quite naturally in the discussions within subject “teams” and in a pivotal group meeting held in January to focus the agenda.

Reflection

One challenge was that a few of the community groups we most wanted to develop partnerships with depended entirely or nearly so on volunteers. They were still going to be critical in some aspects of the research program to come, but their own potential for building research capacity was bound to be limited. A number of the young people in our focus groups were at first reluctant to talk, but our assistant, Adrian Guta, was very skilled in generating discussion and drawing lessons from those encounters.

Another challenge was securing the commitment of academic partners over the long period between our launch of this venture and the submission of the letter of intent to SSHRC. The delay in the submission timing for CURA proposals exacerbated the problem, though we ended with a large and varied team.

Even more challenging was retaining the involvement of young participants in planning meetings. This was a problem we never resolved, though it has clearly alerted us to the need to address this question if we are provided funding for the submission of a full application to SSHRC.