



Not a Unicorn: Bold and Innovative Programming for LGBTQ+ Children, Youth and their Families

Presented by:

Spencer Small, MSW, RSW and Washington Silk, MSW, RSW

OK2BME Program at KW Counselling Services

November 12, 2017

Today's Learning Objectives

- To understand what constitutes a multi-levelled approach to serving LGBTQ+ children, youth and their families
- To learn the various components of a multi-levelled LGBTQ+ program
- To understand the current issues affecting LGBTQ+ children, youth and their families
- To learn of the various ways to challenge homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and cissexism
- To learn how to create safe, inclusive and supportive environments
- To learn how to create LGBTQ+ programming within mainstream community based agencies

The OK2BME Program at KW Counselling Services – Past

- Support services for LGBTQ+ Folks in Waterloo region ages 5 and up
- Began from humble beginnings 12 years ago
- Currently funded by the Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Services and the Ontario Trillium Foundation

Past Funders

- Royal Bank of Canada (19-29 year olds)
- Kitchener-Waterloo Community Fund 30+



The OK2BME Program at KW Counselling Services – Present

Who We Are:

The OK2BME program consists of three unique areas including confidential counselling services, an OK2BME Youth Group for individuals 13-18 as well as public education, consulting and training around LGBTQ+ issues.

OK2BME's services are provided by the staff and supervised placement students at KW Counselling Services. Ok2BME Staff identify as either LGBTQ+ or an LGBTQ+ Ally. They are trained in various psychotherapy models and understand current LGBTQ+ issues

Why We Do the Work

The LGBTQ+ community is resilient, strong but vulnerable community

LGBTQ people face:

- Higher rates of depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive and phobic disorders, suicidality, self-harm, and substance use among LGBT people^x
- Double the risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- LGBTQ youth face approximately 14 times the risk of suicide and substance abuse than heterosexual peers^{xii}
- 77% of trans respondents in an Ontario-based survey had seriously considered suicide and 45% had attempted suicide
- Trans youth and those who had experienced physical or sexual assault were found to be at greatest risk

(Canadian Mental Health Association, 2017)

Introducing Cam

Cam

13 years old

Grade 8

Identifies as Non-Binary

Loves drawing, music and gaming

Has a couple of close friends and a girlfriend

Parents are divorced

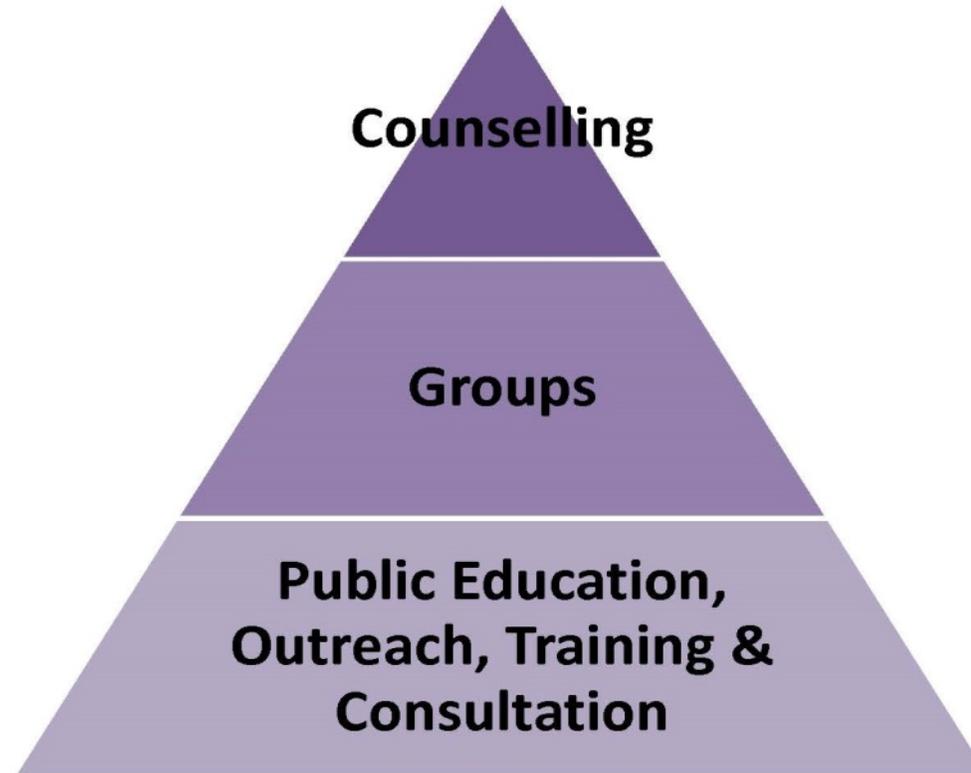
Lives with father

Has two younger siblings a sister who is 10 and a brother who is 5

Non-Binary

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udI-Go8KK2Q>

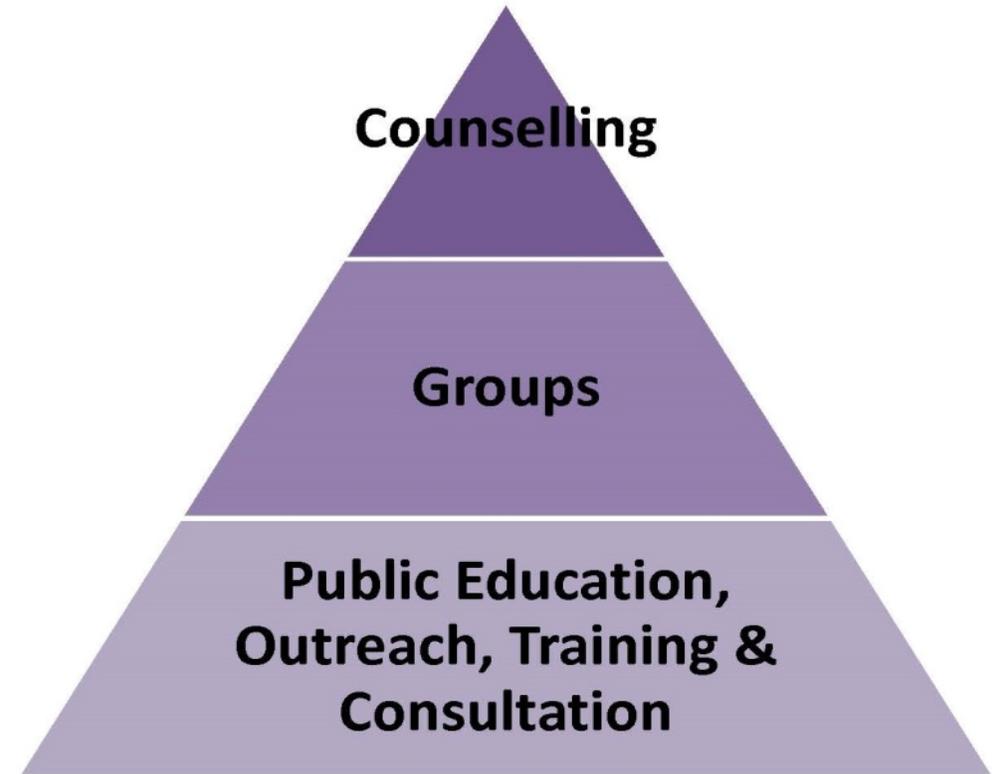
The 3 Main OK2BME Service Areas



Public Education, Outreach, Training and Consultation

- Education to diverse professionals on gender and sexuality awareness
- Anti-bullying and inclusivity education in schools
- Free LGBTQ+ consultations to peer and allied professionals
- An annual Gender and Sexuality Awareness Conference for grade 7 to 12 students
- Rainbow Parenting Program

The OK2BME program's foundation is based upon public education, with the idea that the more educated the Waterloo Region Community is on this topic, the more likely we are to see an increase in inclusion of LGBTQ+ people and a decrease of homo/bi/trans phobia in our community



The Need for Safe, Inclusive Schools for LGBTQ+ Students

- 70% of all participating students, LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ, reported hearing expressions such as “that's so gay” every day in school and almost half (48%) reported hearing remarks such as “faggot,” “lezbo,” and “dyke” every day in school.
- Almost two thirds (64%) of LGBTQ students and 61% of students with LGBTQ parents reported that they feel unsafe at school.
- More than one in five (21%) LGBTQ students reported being physically harassed or assaulted due to their sexual orientation.



Egale’s *“Every Class in Every School: Final Report on the First National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia in Canadian Schools”*

How We Responded to the Need

- The OK2BME program engaged in the creation and maintenance of numerous Gender and Sexuality Awareness Groups (**GSAs**) in Waterloo Region at both the elementary and secondary school levels
- Created an annual Gender and Sexuality Awareness Group (GSA) Conference for middle school and elementary school aged LGBTQ+ students, allies and teachers

GSAs are school-based organizations or clubs that work towards creating positive and safer spaces for youth and their allies. GSAs create visibility for LGBTQ issues in schools and offer a place for youth who are struggling to feel safe.

The activities of GSAs vary across schools but usually two common goals drive their work 1) advocating for LGBTQ rights in schools, and 2) providing a supportive place for youth who need it. GSAs also connect LGBTQ youth to community resources outside of schools.

How We Responded to the Need

The OK2BME program:

- Provided LGBTQ+ Inclusion education to **2752 students**
- Offered consultation to the Waterloo Region District School Board in their development of Administrative Procedure 1235 “Accommodation of Persons Who Identify as Transgender”

The Success of Our Public Education Program

- Since March 2016, **4982 individuals** have been educated on LGBTQ+ issues and learned about OK2BME services. Specifically **117 people in businesses, 1402 professionals** (principals, social workers, teachers, students, nurses), **2752 students** and **600 community members**.
- In 2017, 55 LGBTQ+ consultations were provided to local professionals.

Groups

LGBTQ+ youth group

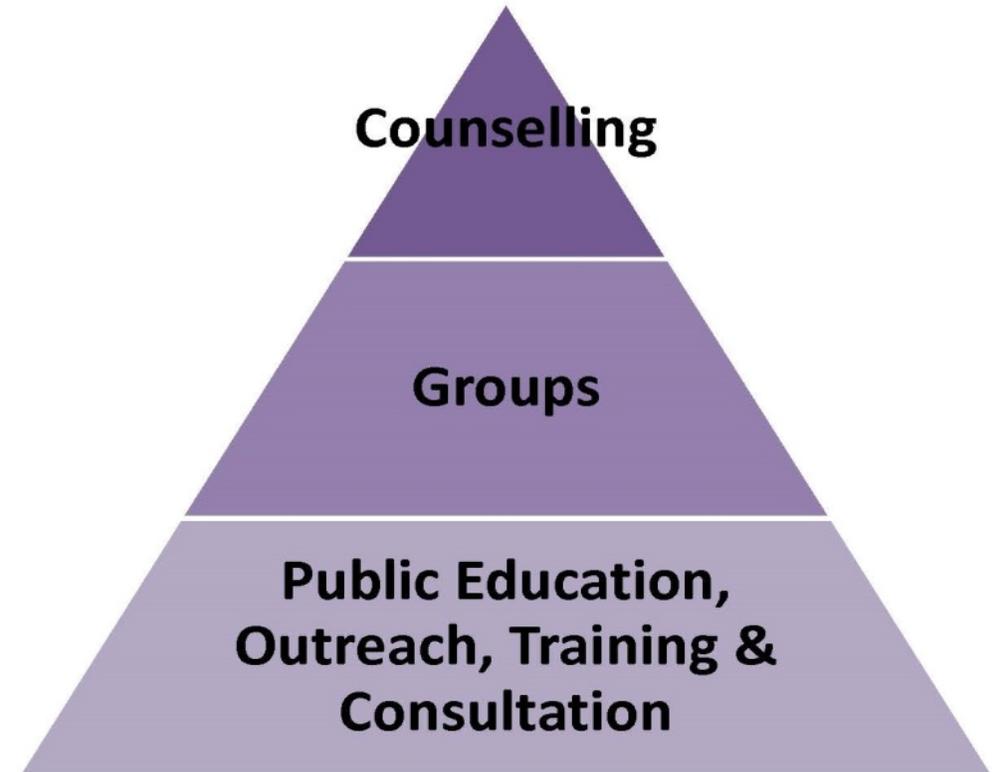
- A free recreational LGBTQ+ youth group for 13-18 year olds and an LGBTQ+ leadership group for youth

Youth Leadership Group

- Assists with the planning of the GSA Conference
- Group learns peer support and group facilitation skills, event management and budgeting

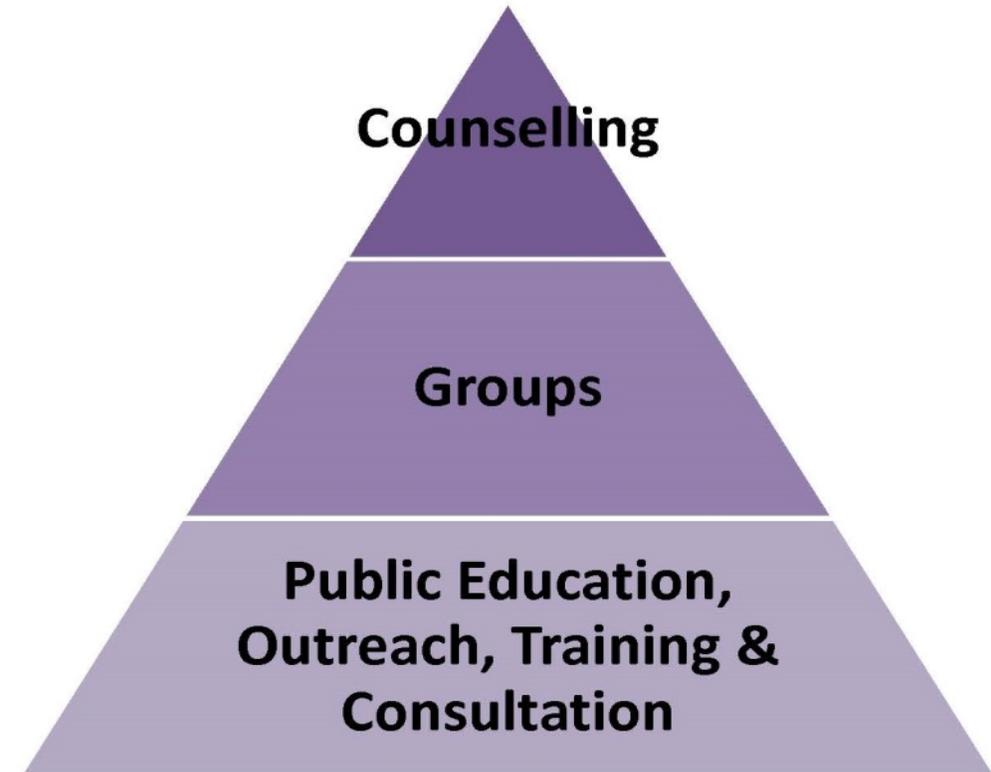
The New Mentality

- A youth-facilitated group who work with partner children and youth mental health agencies in their communities to raise awareness of mental health issues, eliminate stigma, and improve local mental health services



Counselling - Individual, Couples and Family

- A low barrier intake process
- Online referral form
- Free evidence based-psychotherapy for LGBTQ+ individuals
- Weekly OK2BME walk-in counselling: an innovative program, that offers free walk-in counselling to high school students at a local Waterloo Region District School Board high school
- Free in school counselling by appointment
- OK2BME counsellors available at the agency's weekly, walk-in clinic
- In the process of engaging in video and electronic psychotherapy



The OK2BME Program at KW Counselling Services – Future

- Operating a Gender Journeys Group at KW Counselling Services
- Increasing the number of times in a month the OK2BME Youth Group is ran
- Having a support group for LGBTQ individuals 19-29 years old
- Developing programming for LGBTQ Newcomers
- Having OK2BME Walk-In Counselling Clinics in all high schools in Waterloo Region

LGBTQ+ Affirmative Practice

- Infused into every component of the program
- Starts with the greeting from the receptionist
- Is evident with LGBTQ+ literature and symbols in the waiting room
- Is clear in the first minutes of the appointment when the therapist shares their affirming stance on gender and sexual diversity, self identifies, shares their own pronouns and uses inclusive language
- Is evident in the therapist's awareness of local LGBTQ+ resources and current LGBTQ+ literature



LGBTQ+ Affirmative Therapy

- Is a corrective emotional experience
- Provides psychoeducation
- Explores the trauma, shame, alienation, isolation and neglect that occurs to LGBTQ+ persons
- Is trauma informed
- Addresses minority stress



Minority Stress



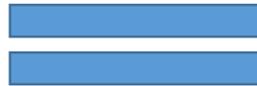
Internalized
Homo/bi/Transphobia



Stigma, the expectations of
rejection and discrimination



Actual experience of discrimination &
violence



Minority Stress

What You Can Do

- Learn more about gender identity and expression
- Think beyond the binary
- Honour a person's gender identity and expression
- Use inclusive language
- Be mindful of intrusive questions
- If you see discriminatory policy or behaviour speak up
- Promote workshops and training for all students, faculty and staff on gender identity and expression
- Create and post signs identifying inclusive spaces for LGBTQ persons by people or offices where sensitivity training has been received

What Your Organization Can Do

- Assess the needs of trans and gender non-conforming folks
- Identify single stall washrooms and where feasible label them “all gender” or “gender inclusive” with a sign on the door
- Collect Data, who are you serving?
- Include language protecting gender identity and expression in your institution’s policies – these should reflect Ontario Human Rights Code on gender identity and expression
- Educate staff and clients on the right of individuals identifying their gender differently to use the washroom or change room they feel most comfortable with
- Create protocol to permit individuals to state a preferred name and or gender in records

Give the World Some Colour

“ If you see me doing something that defies “traditional gender norms,” don’t place blame on my parents or family. Give them praise! It means that they are awesome enough to understand that I need their love and support more than anything. Them forcing me to express a gender that I don’t exactly associate with or trying to “fix” me would do dangerous things to me. I don’t need them to tell me to “act like a lady” or “man up.” I need them to tell me that I was perfectly created. If everybody in the world were the same or “expected” this would be a very boring world. People like me give the world color” – Lori Duron, “Raising My Rainbow”

Activity/Discussion:

How to Create Multi-levelled LGBTQ+ Programming in Your Area

