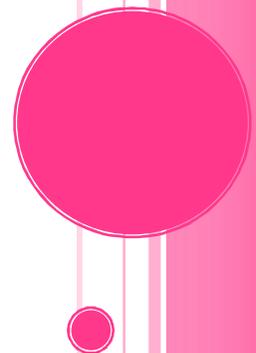


THE AARON WEBSTER ANTI-VIOLENCE PROJECT

A Summary Report



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2008 The Centre, A Community Centre Serving and Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Transgendered, Bisexual (LGTB) People and their Allies, in partnership with the Vancouver Police Department received funding from the Ministry of Public Safety & Solicitor General's Safe Streets & Safe Schools Initiative. Together they organized a series of public and community-specific forums were organized to strengthen existing relationships between the Vancouver Police Department and local LGTB communities and in so doing address the under-reporting of violence (both hate-motivated violence and relationship violence) in LGTB communities

A series of pre-forum consultations were held with individuals from trans, Two-Spirit and queer youth communities as well as with service providers working in area of LGTB anti-violence. These consultations helped to inform and direct the development of the forums. The forums were promoted through various avenues, including in Xtra West which agreed to be the media sponsor. Community groups and organizations were also approached to be "community supporters." Supporters were acknowledged on all promotional materials and publicly at the forums and agreed to actively promote the forums to through their networks. Community supporters included Little Sister's Bookstore, Safe Choices, and West Enders Against Violence.

A total of five forums were held. Two public forums were held in Vancouver's West End and Commercial Drive neighbourhoods. Three community forums were held for 1) trans, 2) Two-Spirit/queer people of colour, and 3) queer youth (aged 25 & under). Each forum was divided into three sections: 1) presentation about crimes motivated by prejudice, bias, or hate followed by questions and answers, 2) a presentation on relationship violence by Domestic Violence Unit in relationships, and 3) community consultation component to learn why violence against and within LGTB communities is underreported and what would make it easier for individuals to report. Participants were also invited to share ideas on how VPD and communities could collaborate to stop the violence and help make LGTB communities safer.

When asked about why violence (hate-motivated and relationship violence) within LGBT communities is under-reported, a number of key themes emerged:

- Historic strained relationships between police and LGTB communities
- Little trust in outcomes of reporting
- Fear of negative repercussions
- Fear of being out
- Homophobia is routine & internalized homophobia
- Lack of resources & support

A number of suggestions to increase reporting and increase safety were put forward:

- Broaden notions on what to report and how to report (eg. verbal assaults)
- Develop options for anonymous or third party reporting. A LGTB Victim Service Worker was central to this suggestion.

- Inform communities that a complaint (with VPD) mechanism exists
- Undertake education about same-sex relationship violence within VPD, mainstream and LGTB communities; offer more resources on healthy same-sex relationships
- Undertake a public ad campaign to demonstrate that VPD is concerned about the safety of LGTB communities; and send a strong message to mainstream communities that violence against LGTB people will not be tolerated.
- Increase education efforts within schools to combat violence and help forge tomorrow's leaders
- Offer regular self-defense and personal safety classes for LGTB people
- Increase financial support to organizations such as The Centre to develop and expand appropriate programs and services to address violence and support victims, including a victim service worker

A number of suggestions were also offered that were specific to the training of VPD officers, as well to interacting with trans and Two-Spirit/queers of colour communities.

At each forum, participants were asked to complete feedback forms and provide any additional ideas. Feedback forms indicated that the majority of participants increased their knowledge to how police respond to hate-motivated violence and relationship violence, as well as community resources. Community members and police lauded the opportunity to talk openly with one another in a respectful atmosphere. This openness had an effect on people's willingness to report violence. More than half reported they are now more likely to report to police if they experience an incident of violence.

In conclusion, the forums were an excellent opportunity to strengthen existing relationships between the Vancouver Police Department and local LGTB communities. It is rare that community members have an opportunity to dialogue with members of the police force in a non-emergency setting. The VPD's willingness to engage in this process sends a strong message to local LGTB communities. The increasing trust and relationship building that emerged from these forums are invaluable; yet they are also tenuous. To stop the violence and improve the safety of LGTB people, we need to continue to forge bridges and collaborate.

The Centre will continue to work with the Vancouver Police Department and is currently reviewing the many suggestions that emerged from the forums with the hopes of securing additional funding to implement them. Stay tuned for details.

THE AARON WEBSTER COMMUNITY FORUMS PROJECT

A Summary Report

Background

In March 2008, The Centre, A Community Centre Serving and Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Transgendered, Bisexual (LGTB) People and their Allies, in partnership with the Vancouver Police Department's Diversity & Aboriginal Policing Section successfully applied for funding from Safe Streets & Safe Schools, Ministry of Public Safety & Solicitor General. The main objectives of this project were to address the under-reporting of violence (hate-motivated and relationship violence) and to increase safety within LGTB communities. This report documents the outcomes of this project – the Aaron Webster Community Forums.

Project Activities

Hiring of Forums Coordinator

A job description was circulated in July for a Forums Coordinator. The position required a coordinator to organize a series of five public and/or population specific community forums with attention to all logistics. The position also required the coordinator to assist in the promotion, facilitation and evaluation of the project. Rebecca Haskell was contracted by The Centre for the period September 15th to December 12, 2008 and was supervised by The Centre's Education Outreach Services Program Manager.

Planning Meetings

A Planning Group was established that included Rebecca Haskell, forums coordinator; Peter Toppings, The Centre's Education Outreach Services Program Manager; Inspector John De Hass and Lori Beackstead, representatives from the VPD's Diversity & Policing Section; and Adriane Egan, a community counselor with the Domestic Violence Unit (a partnership of Family Services of Greater Vancouver and VPD). The Planning group met several times to oversee the planning, promotion and evaluation of the forums.

Pre-forums Community Consultations

A series of pre-forum consultations were held with individuals from trans, two-spirit and queer youth communities as well as with service providers working in area of LGTB anti-violence. These consultations helped to inform and direct the development of the forums.

Community members also helped to identify people best suited to co-facilitate the forums and appropriate venues.

Suggestions included a good balance between presentations and opportunities for discussion. Many felt it was also important that police acknowledge that relationships with LGBT communities have not always been positive. The trans group and queer youth in particular emphasized the importance of anonymity in creating a safe environment for discussion and requested that no media be present. Many involved in the consultations expressed their concerns that past histories with police may be an impediment to community participation in the forums.

Selection of Facilitators and Sites

Facilitators for each of the forums were chosen based on recommendations from community members and facilitation experience. Each was given an honorarium as an expression of thanks for their time and participation. Venues were chosen based on a number of factors including location (proximity to West End and East Vancouver neighbourhoods), history of being LGTB friendly, availability, cost, and seating capacity.

Advertisement/Promotion

A graphic designer was hired to develop promotional cards with the tagline ‘Stop the Violence.’ One thousand cards were distributed to LGTB friendly businesses and organizations. Emails with detailed information on the forums were sent out to various list-serves and posted on social networking websites (i.e. Facebook, livejournal). In addition, the forums were promoted on The Centre’s website, at community events, and in PSA’s sent to local media. News 1130, CBC Radio (On the Coast Program), CBC TV News, Global TV News, BCIT Student Radio, Out TV, and Xtra West covered the forums.

Xtra West, Vancouver Lesbian and Gay Biweekly, agreed to be the media sponsor for the series and published ads in three issues of Xtra at discounted rates. Community groups and organizations were invited to be “community supporters.” Supporters agreed to actively promote the forums to their networks and were included on promotional materials and publicly acknowledged at the forums. Community supporters included Little Sister’s Bookstore, Safe Choices, and West Enders Against Violence. The Ministry of Public Safety & Solicitor General of British Columbia was gratefully acknowledged on all promotional material and at each forum.

The Forums

A total of five forums were held. Two public forums were held in Vancouver’s West End and Commercial Drive neighbourhoods. Although LGTB people live throughout Vancouver Lower Mainland, these neighbourhoods are typically seen by many as community hubs. To ensure greater accessibility for more marginalized LGTB people, three community forums were held for 1) trans people, 2) Two-Spirit/queer people of colour, and 3) queer youth (under 25). The forums

were launched in the West End on November 17th, the seventh anniversary of Aaron Webster's brutal murder in 2001.

Each forum was held on a week night for 2.5 hours. The forums followed the same format and were divided into three sections:

- presentation by a Hate Crime Investigator from VPD about crimes motivated by prejudice, bias, or hate, followed by questions and answers
- presentation by a Constable and Counselor from the Domestic Violence Unit on relationship violence followed by questions and answers, and
- community consultation component to learn why violence against and within LGTB communities is under-reported and what would make it easier for people to report. Participants were also invited to share their ideas and suggestions on ways in which VPD and communities can work together to stop the violence and increase safety in LGTB communities.

The forums concluded with a discussion of community resources and evaluations forms were distributed to be completed by participants.

Terre Flower, an experienced facilitator with a strong background in diversity work, was recruited to facilitate the two public forums. The three community forums were co-facilitated by guest facilitators from each respective community and the forums coordinator. A volunteer counselor or support person was on hand at each forums to provide support if necessary to anyone who may have been triggered by the discussions.

Public Forums

The two public forums were open to all members of the public including media. Approximately twenty-five LGTB community members attended the West End forum and another twenty participants attended the East Vancouver forum. The Vancouver Police Department was well represented with a number of officers attending, including Sergeants from Districts in East Vancouver and the West End, community policing liaisons, school liaisons, Staff Sergeants, the Inspector in command of the Diversity & Policing Section (DAPS), and the Chief Constable. A representative from the Transit Police attended the two public forums as well. Denise Norman, a member of Aaron Webster's family, was invited to speak at each of the public forums.

Community Forums

Fifteen queer-identified youths (under the age of twenty-five) attended the youth forum; and approximately ten individuals attended both the Two-Spirit/queer people of colour and trans community forums, respectively. Although attendance was lower than expected, small numbers helped to create an intimate environment in which many participants shared openly and in-depth.

Community Consultations

The community consultation component of each forum was prefaced with the assumption that hate motivated violence (bashings) and relationship violence within LGBT communities are under-reported. The following questions were put out to participants: If this assumption is true, why do you think that is? What would make it easier for members of our communities to report?

This section begins with a summary of barriers to reporting followed by some suggested strategies to increase reporting.

Barriers to Reporting

Historical Relations with Police

A common theme that emerged in all forums concerned historical relationships with police and the justice system. LGTB communities have had long and volatile relationship with police and the courts throughout most jurisdictions in North America (and the world.) Whether historical or current, this fear and mistrust lingers today and prevents some LGBT people from coming forward and reporting incidents to police. In the case of refugees and immigrants, these abuses took place in their home countries but they carry this trust with them. It was strongly expressed by many participants that the VPD must acknowledge this history.

Little Trust in Outcomes of Reporting

Some participants from each forum questioned whether it was worth the effort to report hate-motivated violence and relationship violence. In relation to hate crimes, the general perception is that the threshold for recommending a hate crime is too high (for example, if there is no verbal exchange it is tough to prove the act was motivated by prejudice, bias, or hate). In addition, participants said when police recommend a 718 application, the Crown does not follow those recommendations. Other concerns centered on lenient sentencing of those who assault LGTB people. In general, participant felt that the process of reporting and testifying was too cumbersome for the outcome.

One recommendation is be to educate the LGTB community that an assault is punishable under the law no matter what the motivation. Reporting can lead to criminal sanction even if the offence is not deemed a “hate crime”. For the LGTB community, however, biased, prejudiced, or hate motivated violence against one of us is violence against all of us. There needs to be awareness that even without the increased sentencing provisions, a physical attack can still be charged as an assault. That charge can result in criminal sanction and perhaps a hesitancy to target someone in the LGTB community again. Yet, for LGTB communities, the symbolism of having an attack deemed a “hate crime” is important. A failure to label attacks against LGTB

people as such feels like a denial that homophobia and transphobia were at the root of the assaults.

With respect to domestic violence, there is a perception that laws cannot do much to improve one's situation. Some people are also hesitant to report relationship violence to the police because they want the violence to stop but do not want their partner to be criminalized. The forum helped to address these fears as participants learned about community resources they could access for assistance that would not necessarily result in arrest or charges against their partners.

Fear of Negative Repercussions

Fears of negative consequences (of reporting) were expressed in various contexts. Participants, especially at the youth and East Vancouver forums expressed not only fear of repercussions from a partner if they reported relationship violence, but backlash from the community as well i.e. why are you tarnishing our community by airing 'dirty laundry.' In addition, LGBTB parents who are victims of relationship violence may fear that their children will be taken away if they report the abuse as their home will be viewed as unsafe.

The LGBTB community needs to work to support one another when victimization is reported so that people do not fear isolation from their own communities. Emphasizing that relationship violence can happen in *any* relationship and in any community may help the community to encourage others to report violence they experience and individuals to feel more inclined to report. Finally, having resources and a victim services worker to help LGBTB individuals who experience relationship violence to navigate the criminal justice system may help as well.

Fear of being out

Participants indicated that some people may be reluctant to report violence because of fears of being outed in the process. Interestingly, a police officer at the East Vancouver forum related his first hand experience with a victim of an assault who was terrified his family would find out through the report that he was gay. This fear was expressed most in the forum for two-spirit people and queer people of colour. Participants noted that African & South Asian cultures (like many others) are very conservative; accordingly, many people are not out in their cultural communities. People feared that reporting violence and possibly going to trial would out them and subsequently exclude them from their cultural communities.

This suggests that not only is there work to be done building relationships with police agencies, but in diverse cultural communities as well so that people do not have to sacrifice their personal safety to retain connections to their cultural communities. As one person said, "it is not the responsibility of the police alone, it is a collective responsibility".

Homophobia is Routine & Internalized Homophobia

This theme emerged in the East Vancouver and youth forums where community members said they had become so accustomed to experiences of homophobia that as long as they were not physically harmed it was something they understood it to be a part of being LGTB. At each forum, the issue of internalized homophobia also came up. This internalization was complicated by issues of masculinity. One participant expressed that gay men might be reluctant to report because it was emasculating for men to admit that they had been victimized. This internalized homophobia led some people to believe that the violence they experience is too trivial to bother police.

Lack of Resources

One of the most significant themes that emerged from the forums was the scarcity of resources, and/or lack of knowledge of existing resources, to support LGTB people who experience violence. In some instances, appropriate resources simply do not exist. For example, the lack of safe emergency housing for gay/trans men feeling relationship violence came up several times in discussion. While this is a gap in support services for gay/trans men, many participants were not aware of the mandate and openness of resources like BC Society for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse. The forums highlighted gaps in resources, but also illustrated that many community members are unaware of existing resources.

Strategies to Increase Reporting

Broaden our notions of what to report and how to report

Police representatives urged LGTB community members to report verbal harassment, especially when there was a threat of physical violence. None too often, community members at best only report physical violence. Offenders/bashers often start with verbal assaults before escalating to more aggressive acts of violence. By reporting verbal assaults, at least a history of incidents is being recorded and may be helpful in demonstrating hate motivation at later dates when more serious assaults occur. In summary:

- Need to convey message that not only physical violence that should be reported
- Have more presentations specifically on how to report and what happens in that process
 - What to report and where
 - What happens to the information
- Promotion/advertisement of numbers to call if reporting non-physical assaults
- Create and distribute an information card to hand out detailing what police need to know to report a bashing (license plate no. description of assailant(s) etc)
 - easy, accessible & user friendly
 - phone numbers to call to report

- Media reports on positive interactions with police and outcomes to let people know it is worth reporting

Option for anonymous reporting or third party reporting

Reporting to police may be intimidating for many community members. This may be especially daunting for people who are marginalized, who have been historically mistreated by police, or who may not be out publicly. Participants suggested that avenues for anonymous reporting or third party reporting may help LGBT people who may otherwise not be prepared to report directly to police. Speaking with someone at The Centre in person or through the Prideline were suggested as possible options as well as Crime Stoppers. One participant shared that his decision to report hinged on knowing that his decision not to testify in court would be respected.

Having someone act as a liaison between LGTB communities and the police, or other government agencies would help to close the information gap that has for so long existed between these groups. Suggested liaisons include:

- Police/community liaison
- School liaison officers and promoting discussions and understanding of the experience of LGTB youths in the schools is important

LGTB Victim Service Worker

The need for a victim services worker at The Centre was brought up several times. Having someone in a LGTB space who is known to be LGTB/friendly would reassure victims about safety and ensure that they will not be re-victimized in stepping forward to report. In addition, a victim service worker could help people to navigate the criminal justice system in a way that is respectful and understands their concerns and realities. Many participants felt the absence of a victim services worker left a considerable gap in the support services for LGTB people. This is one of the populations most affected by violence and to have no dedicated LGTB-specific victim services was discouraging for many people.

Complaint Mechanism

The Chief Constable, Deputy Chief Constables, and Staff Sergeants in attendance stressed that anyone who is not satisfied with the treatment they receive from members of the Vancouver Police Department should file a complaint. The Officers assured everyone that those complaints would be taken seriously.

Education about same-sex relationship violence

A “re-education” of community members and police about relationship violence was also recommended. Relationship violence is usually framed as male violence against women. This

can exclude males who are victimized by their female partners and can especially make same-sex domestic violence invisible. On-going education about same-sex relationship violence is needed within police, mainstream and LGBT communities.

Additional Suggestions for Increasing Safety

In the second part of the community consultation, participants were invited to share their ideas and suggestions on what police, LGTB communities and others can do together collaboratively to stop the violence and increase safety. This was asked in relationship to both a) hate crimes, b) relationship violence

Public Ad Campaign

Many participants suggested that a public advertisement campaign is needed to combat homophobia and transphobia and to raise awareness about the contributions of LGTB communities. A public campaign would show LGTB communities that the VPD is concerned about their safety and would also send a strong message to broader mainstream communities that violence against LGTB people will not be tolerated.

Present an United Front

Community members and police felt strongly that a united front against violence would be an effective tool in stopping the violence and increasing safety. This would include endorsements from elected officials, community leaders and celebrities to champion the message that Vancouver does not tolerate violence against LGTB people. Suggestions included:

- A town call with the mayor, council, & VPD to really create a united and visible, message of zero tolerance
- Set up a broad-based committee at city hall including politicians, police, educators etc. to develop a coordinated strategy to educate the public on LGTB hate crimes

Education within Schools

Schools were also identified as important venues where issues affecting LGTB people should be discussed:

- Encourage discussion of the experiences of LGBT youths in our schools
- Start education early in schools and universities – as they are our future leaders
- Outreach to parents and let them know how bashing and violence affects all children
- Involve Gay Straight Alliances to increase reporting and safety

Education on Healthy Relationships

There is very little information or resources on healthy LGTB relationships and a general absence of role models. To help combat relationship violence within LGBT communities, more opportunities for discussions, workshops and resource materials are needed on healthy queer relationships. This would help pass on knowledge about what constitutes healthy relationships throughout our communities and provide options for individuals who may be in abusive situations.

Self Defense Classes

A number of participants advocated for regular self defense and personal safety classes for LGTB people:

- More information and training about situational awareness and self-defense training

More Financial Support

Some participants spoke to the need to financially support The Centre and other organizations to develop and expand appropriate programs to address violence and support victims:

- Resources are needed! The Centre needs finances to get programs going to address same-sex relationship violence

The three following sections merited separate discussions as they were rich with recommendations:

Training of VPD

At each forum, police were asked about what training front line officers and other members in the department receive on LGBT communities and other marginalized groups. Officers responded with the following:

- Although it is difficult to train all in-service members on specific issues, all recruits receive training on diversity.
- Officers are required to update/receive training after their 5th year on the force
- Memorandums are also circulated to disseminate knowledge.
- In the past two years, front line officers have also been equipped with a hate and terrorism database documenting various symbols associated with crimes motivated by hate, prejudice and bias.
- Senior management mirrors the behaviours they want to see sending a strong message that LGBT people are family, friends and neighbours and deserve respect
- Applicants are screened in attempt to hire employees who are accepting of diversity, including LGBT people .

In general, participants urged the Vancouver Police Department to have “ongoing training” to ensure that officers at every level were competent in interacting with LGBT people. And, in turn, members of the Vancouver Police Department acknowledged that, as in many areas, there could be more training. Some members emphasized the importance of experiential training over work done in a classroom setting as well. Advertising about this training and any initiatives that build bridges with LGTB community members should be highlighted as well.

In discussions with the Two-Spirit/queer people of colour group, participants asked not only about training to sensitize officers to LGBT issues, but to refugees and immigrants as well. For many refugees and immigrants, the police in their home countries are the perpetrators of crime. These experiences make trusting police challenging and difficult. This group also highlighted the need for sensitivity in interacting with people whose first language is not English. One person described these sensitivities as basic and “critical to maintaining relationships”.

The trans group also said that trans-specific training was needed so that police officers would have the tools to interact respectfully with trans communities. They noted that often service providers have good intentions when it comes to training on LGTB issues, but that when it comes to the “T” they don’t know the practicalities of how to do that.

Recommendations:

- ensure that officers receive on-going training on LGTB communities with a focus on experiential training in addition to classroom learning
- ensure that police receive appropriate and adequate training on trans issues - separate and in addition to LGB training.
- ensure officers receive training on working with diverse cultural/immigrant/refugee groups, and with people whose first language is not English
- increase efforts to reach out to newcomers by the VPD to let them know that police are approachable and can be trusted
- inform LGBT communities about the training opportunities officers receive

Recommendations: Trans Forum

Strained relations, fear of police, and experiences with disrespectful police officers were central to discussions in the trans forum. Participants spoke of their own experiences and of other trans people. Individuals were called by their birth name, rather than their current legal names and referred to with an incorrect pronoun or even “it”. Others experienced apathy or hostility when they attempted to interact with police. When dealing with trans people, participants suggested officers should use their legal names, not birth names and check in with them about “what pronoun do you prefer?”, rather than guessing or using inappropriate pronouns/descriptors.

Other concerns were raised on the treatment by police of trans people who are sex trade workers. There was concern about how trans people are treated when stopped or arrested for an offence. Sometimes trans peoples' identification does not match their appearance which can escalate situations. Participants asked questions how individuals in transition would be treated upon arrest. Concerns about body searches and where trans people are housed in prisons, which are typically gender segregated spaces, were expressed.

A major suggestion that came out of the trans forum was that the VPD could demonstrate their openness to diversity by actively recruiting LGTB people. Trans participants felt that including trans in Human Resources policies could go a long way to showing potential employees that the VPD is trans-friendly. One person wrote on their survey "Hire trans people. Any organization that has a reputation as trans friendly will have trans folks apply. Establish even a tentative reputation and you'll have applicants a plenty". A force with "out" LGTB people would be a true indication of the VPD's support for these communities. As one police officer said in relation to racial/ethnic/cultural minorities, "it makes a difference when you can see yourself in the police".

To put fears and misconceptions about police interactions to rest, forum attendees suggested that a Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) list be made available outlining how trans people should expect to be treated. They also emphasized that the VPD should acknowledge its poor reputation when it comes to dealing with some minority groups. To ease fears while not denying this history, participants at the trans forum suggested that police officers say something like "I know that's the way that it has been, but that's not what's going to happen today". Changed in department practices and policies that move towards inclusion and respect for diversity could also be advertised to get that message out to LGTB communities.

Recommendations:

- Include trans/gender identity in VPD's human resource polices and actively recruit LGBT people to join the force
- develop a FAQs resource for officers outlining how to respectfully interact with trans individuals and communities
- VPD to find ways to support and acknowledge (but not attend at this point) the local Trans Day of Remembrance (TDOR – November 20th) – in addition to Pride events.
- Encourage community members to share stories of positive interactions with police with each other and not just negative encounters.

Recommendations: Two-Spirit/Queer People of Colour Forum

Participants in each forum indicated some LGTB people may be reluctant to report because of their fear of being 'outed' during criminal justice proceedings. This fear was expressed mostly in

the forum for Two-Spirit people and queer people of colour. Participants shared that many African & South Asian cultures (like many others) are very conservative; accordingly, many people are not out in their cultural communities. People feared that reporting and perhaps going to trial would out them and they would become excluded from their cultural communities due to widespread homophobia and transphobia. One person said he would rather “cry on the inside” and heal his wounds himself than report and be outed in his community. He went on to say that fears about reporting mount with each identity – for those who are sexual minorities, racial/ethnic/cultural minorities, and refugees or immigrants those fears are tremendous.

Participants who identified as refugees or new immigrants were particularly concerned that reporting harassment/violence may affect their status in Canada. There is a need for police and other agencies to assure people new to Canada that reporting victimization will have no effect on their status. Newcomers need to have opportunities to learn about their rights in Canada. Perhaps creating and distributing a resource sheet outlining the legal rights of refugees and immigrants in interacting with the criminal justice system would be helpful. This could involve Immigration Canada and perhaps the resource sheet could be distributed at events that (queer) refugees and immigrants attend.

The Two-Spirit/queer people of colour forum was significantly under-attended by Aboriginal LGBT people. A complicated history of cultural genocide coupled with police clashes may have played a major role in the absence of Two-Spirit people attending the forums. Members of the police and the community expressed the desire for a deeper understanding of the “true history” of the cultural genocide aboriginal communities have experienced and the impacts on individuals and families. The VPD’s Diversity & Aboriginal Policing Section have undertaken a number of initiatives to build relationships with aboriginal communities. Perhaps Two-Spirit communities could be included in the future in this relationship building.

Recommendations:

- increase opportunities to work with and educate diverse cultural communities about LGBT individuals and communities
- increase efforts to reach out to newcomers by the VPD to let them know that police are approachable and can be trusted
- increase opportunities to educate newcomers about their legal rights in Canada; develop a resource sheet outlining the legal rights of immigrants and refugees with respect to the criminal justice system
- VPD’s Diversity & Aboriginal Policing section to include a Two-Spirit component in their outreach to Aboriginal communities

Summary of Feedback Forms

This final sections outline the demographic characteristics of participants and feedback about the forums gathered from follow up surveys.

Of approximately 80 community participants, completed feedback forms n=43

Demographics of Participants

Gender: Twenty (46%) participants identified as male; eleven (26%) individuals identified as female; and eight (18%) as trans, transsexual, or MTF. One person identified as Two-Spirit.

Sexual Orientation: Twenty-three participants (54%) described their sexual orientation as ‘gay’; eight (19%) identified as queer, and five (12%) as lesbian. Others identified as “soft butch”, FTM who likes guys, MTF who likes girls, and “partner of a male to female transgender individual.”

Age: Age was fairly well distributed among participants. Eight people were 19 years of age or younger; thirteen participants were 20-29 years of age; five were 30-39 and another 5 were 40-49, six participants were 50-59 and two were over 60..

Ethnic/Racial/Cultural Identity: Participants identified their ethnic, racial and cultural identities as follows: 19 as Caucasian; 5 as ‘mixed’; 4 as Aboriginal; 3 as Black; 2 as Asian; 2 as Indian; 1 each as Canadian, European and Spanish. The youth forum had the most diversity, with half identifying as an ethnic minority and half as Caucasian.

Neighbourhoods: 10 participants who responded to a question about where they lived indicated they reside outside of Vancouver. Most of these were from the youth forum. Cities ranged from Burnaby, Surrey, New Westminster, to Gabriola Island and Edmonton. Nine people live in East Vancouver and seven in the West End of Vancouver. Four indicated central Vancouver, three Mount Pleasant and four people simply responded Vancouver.

Feedback about the Forums

Usefulness of Forums

Of the 43 community members who completed a feedback form, 37 (86%) found the forums useful and important. Another 5 (11%) found the forums somewhat useful and important and only one person (2%) said the forum was not useful or important.

Of participants who found the forums useful, the most common explanation as to why was the open dialogue between police and LGTB community members. Having high ranking officers in attendance helped let the community know that the VPD took these forums and relationship building seriously. For example, one person said, “bringing together the queer community in partnership with an outside force that is not always understood is critical in forming a team to combat violence”.

Some other reasons people found the forums useful were:

- It’s important to get this dialogue started
- Visibility of a supportive police force; police participation (at the executive level) goes a long way
- Opened up unsafe issues in a safe venue
- Learned what VPD is doing, how laws work
- Useful for people who didn’t know what to do (before)
- Provided information that isn’t always accessible
- There was a lot of discussion and a diversity of opinions
- Learned some new things about others’ experiences and VPD initiatives
- Gives a better idea what to report and when
- Raises awareness/offers solutions
- To meet other transgender individuals, community agencies and members of the VPD and work together
- The painful history between trans communities and police needs to be witnessed

Of the five participants who ranked the forums as “somewhat useful,” three were from the youth forum, suggesting that this forum may have needed to be more youth-orientated to have met their needs. Many of the youths who attended were connected with The Centre’s Gab Youth Services group. The other two participants who responded “somewhat useful” attended from the East Vancouver forum.

Those who said the forum was “somewhat useful” still had positive comments:

- I got to see the VPD numbers i.e. commitment to our safety.
- I felt I had no real input to give but appreciated the presentation
- If I ever need to call I feel more comfortable
- Learning about police services, resources, and advice about effective 911 calls

The one individual who responded that the forums were ‘not useful’ added that ‘it’s all talk.’”

Eleven police and presenters at the last forum in East Vancouver filled out surveys as well. This would have been helpful to have done at all the forums. All respondents found the forums useful:

- Promoted dialogue within community and police
- Developed relationships
- broadening scope of knowledge and understanding of concerns
- learned of new resources and information specific to LGBT communities
- Provided insight into the struggles people are experiencing

Knowledge of Police Response to Bashings Before and After Forums

Majority (86%) of participants indicated an increase in knowledge of how police respond to bashings. Prior to forums, 42% of participants rated their knowledge about police responses to bashings at about 3 on a scale from 0 to 6. After the forums, the average rating increased to 4 out of 6 (47%) and 5 out of 6 (32%).

Knowledge of Police Responses to Relationship Violence Before and After Forums

Majority (85%) of participants also indicated an increase in knowledge of how police respond to domestic violence. Twice (2x) as many people indicated their starting knowledge of police response to relationship violence was lower (1 or 2 on scale of 0-6) compared to bashings. Post-forums, majority rated their knowledge at 4 (50%) or 5 (33%) out of 6. Clearly, participants gained appreciably more information with respect to relationship violence.

More Knowledge of LGBT Community Resources

27 respondents (62%) indicated that they had more knowledge of community resources. Another 13 (30%) said they felt they has somewhat better knowledge of resources and only two people (5%) said they did not have better knowledge of resources.

One participant who reported they had gained more knowledge about resources within the LGTB community wrote, “there should be a one pager we can distribute within the community and to school GSA [Gay Straight Alliance] clubs.

Which Part of the Forum was the Greatest Benefit?

Sixteen people said they appreciated the open discussion and brainstorming to increase safety in the LGTB communities at the forums. Examples include:

- The discussions from members of the community and VPD. Both groups worked together to understand each others points of view and ways of initiating these measures.
- Open forum for continuing dialogue.
- The openness of all participants.
- Each part because everyone worked together providing excellent suggestions and brainstorming on ways of making our community safer.
- The interactive segment
- Forming ideas to prevent violence

A number felt that police presence was the best part, as it showed their commitment to stopping the violence and increasing safety of LGTB people. Participants also felt they gained valuable

knowledge about reporting, from the approachability of police to specific strategies when reporting. For example:

- Meeting Chief Chu & other officers face to face
- Discussions around reporting even non physically violent incidents
- The idea of calling the police indirectly
- The calls when you see something but you aren't sure if you should make it and knowing you can
- Knowing that I could call people like the Cops
- Knowing that the police would do their best to respond
- Police awareness/involvement
- Getting information from the cops and having them put some of my concerns and fears to rest
- The police explained their role and what they need from us

Others wrote about gaining knowledge about resources from presenters and brochures:

- Presentations by speakers – informative.
- The understanding of resources other than 911
- Knowing that there is help and it's there for us
- Hate crime & relationship violence officers so I can follow up
- Relationship violence – I've been in an abusive relationship and didn't know about the resources

Police members also commented on the value of hearing from the community:

- Hearing people express their experience and how times are changing with attitudes and how the gay community still need to do work in their own community
- Hearing from community members is essential
- Listening to others feelings, concerns, and outlooks
- Hearing personal testimonials and continuing to understand more about historical issues between police & LGBT community
- Listening to the community concerns/ideas
- The sharing of ideas
- Listening to the public

Suggestions for Improvement

There were a number of positive comments about the forums: 5 said they were great!; several respondents indicated they would like to see more forums in the future. Many community members offered suggestions for future forums, including:

- Focus on process of reporting – who to call, what happens etc.

- Vancouver Police Department need to own and acknowledge history and help to make a new history; powerful to say “own history” or organization, can apologize acknowledge that history
- Provide practical steps to diffusing violent situations; self defense may be one method
- Advertise more and/or get more community members out
- Increase discussion/interaction time
- Address harassment/aggression that takes place within community but is not necessarily relationship violence
- Hold similar forums in broader community and with youth in school
- Get politicians and government officials involved

A note on media: A number of respondents expressed discomfort with media (specifically cameras) at the West End forum on their follow-up surveys. In addition, some of the presenters found the media presence “daunting”. In the future, participants suggested that cameras should be turned off for parts of the forum or there should be a media free zone where people who do not want to be on camera can sit. At least two participants said they were generally uncomfortable speaking knowing they were going to be recorded.

Would you Report Violence after this Forum?

Fifty-one percent of respondents indicated they are now more likely to report to police if they should experience a incidence of violence. This number is encouraging and speaks to the impact that the forums had on building stronger, more trusting relationships between police and community. Within the trans group, 67% said they are now more likely to contact police. In other forums, 55% in West End; 50% of the youth; 50% of the Two-Spirit/queer people of colour; and 42% in East Vancouver are more likely to contact police. Thirty-seven percent across forums said they have always been prepared to contact police.

Four people said they were still reluctant to contact police, and two that they would not contact police. One person in this group added that “more needs to be done to build trust.”

Conclusion

The forums were an excellent opportunity to build on existing relationships between the Vancouver Police Department and local LGTB communities. It offered opportunities for community members to learn about police responses to violence (both hate motivated and relationship violence) and for police to learn about community issues. The need for this dialogue and exchange of information to continue was a major theme from all the five forums. In addition to improved communication between LGTB communities and police, participants said that anti-homophobia and -transphobia education needs to extend to broader mainstream communities as well. Media, schools, community leaders and elected officials all play a role in addressing homophobia and transphobia.

It is rare that community members have an opportunity to have a dialogue with members of the police force in a non-emergency setting, including senior management. The VPD's willing to engage in this process sends a strong message to local LGTB communities. The dialogue and relationship building that emerged from these forums are invaluable; yet they are also tenuous. To stop the violence and improve safety for LGTB communities, we need to continue to forge bridges and collaborations.