

## Defining Diversity

*Diversity is commonly understood in terms of dimensions that include but are not limited to race, age, place of origin, religion, ancestry, Aboriginal status, skin colour, citizenship, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, disability/ability, marital, parental or family status, same-sex partnership status, creed, language, educational background, literacy level, geographic location, income level, cultural tradition and work experience.*

Source: Ontario Healthy  
Communities Coalition

## Have a comment, question or story idea? Contact me!

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## Bridging Diversity Committee

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## Focus groups shed light on systemic challenges in responding to diversity

Summer may be a time when things generally slow down in organizations, but not so for the Diversity project led by Developmental Services Toronto (dsto) and Community Living Toronto! Because once the two-year initiative received the funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, we hit the road running.

Our first step was to collaborate with the Developmental Services Ontario, Toronto Region (DSO-TR), in assessing the needs and strengths of the access process with regard to serving ethno-culturally diverse families. Two focus groups were conducted in June by Bob Ferguson and Ilaneet Goren at Surrey Place, the home base of the DSO-TR team. The first group was comprised of Service Assessors while the second had Service Navigators, with 19 people in total. The high level of engagement and participation in the focus group was indicative of the service providers' genuine interest in being part of the diversity conversation. Dona Prince, our Summer Student/Project Assistant, helped with the transcription and summary of the results and we would like to share some of the highlights with you.

Although there are no formal records kept of service-users based on ethnicity, participants estimated based on languages spoken and other factors that about 70%-80% of the families accessing DSO-TR are from immigrant and specific ethno-cultural communities. The focus groups have shed some much needed light on how the first point of access system currently operates in the context of the city's growing diversity, and the challenges staff members are confronted with when responding to families from diverse backgrounds. The picture that has emerged is of a system that would be challenging to navigate for anyone with limited knowledge of that system, let alone families who are being given information in a language and manner often inaccessible to them.

Indeed, not being able to access the information in the client's primary language was noted as one of the most significant barriers to effective linkage to services. Other barriers, as

noted by the Navigators, include difficulty linking families with settlement related programs, such as English classes, that understand and are able to accommodate the unique needs related to having an intellectual disability.

Having the space to speak openly about the challenges is important, but we ultimately hope to be part of the solution. The data from the focus groups suggests some recommendations for system improvement:

1. Increased translation of key service access documents and forms (e.g. fact sheets and assessment forms) into the languages spoken by Toronto's top immigrant groups.
2. Incorporating a greater variety of tools and mediums, such as video and audio with translation capabilities, to enhance cross-cultural communication.
3. Allocating more staffing resources toward community outreach and collaborations with ethno-specific agencies.
4. Having staff reflect the ethno-cultural diversity of the communities served and being able to draw upon colleagues' language skills and cultural knowledge.

What's next for the project?

More training will be provided to the DSO-TR team with special focus on enhancing cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills when dealing with specific diversity-related scenarios. We are also reaching out to over 100 settlement agencies in Toronto to offer information sessions on intellectual disability and access to the developmental services, in partnership with DSO-TR. And, we are in the process of researching 'promising practices' that will culminate in the development of a Diversity Toolkit to be made available to everyone in the sector on ConnectABILITY.ca next spring.

## Working with the South Asian Autism Awareness Centre to empower parents

On July 15, we teamed up with DSO-TR to deliver an information session to parents at the South Asian Autism Awareness Centre (SAAAC). We gave an overview of the services and resources offered by Community Living Toronto, while a DSO representative explained how to access the services that are Ministry funded. Rohan George, Project Manager at SAAAC said the session helped inform and empower the parents.



Located not too far from our Lawson site in Scarborough, SAAAC is a non-profit community organization that has been operating since 2008. It has a multi-disciplinary team providing culturally-specific Autism Spectrum Disorder services and supports to families in the South Asian community. SAAAC is interested in more collaborations with other organizations in the developmental sector, and with Community Living Toronto in particular. This is an excellent and well-timed opportunity for us to increase outreach to diverse ethno-cultural communities, and to work more closely with ethno-specific organizations to address the barriers to service access that many families in these communities face. For more information visit [www.saaac.org](http://www.saaac.org).

## sprOUT Toronto in the World Pride Parade

Imagine how affirming it is to have tens of thousands of people waving to you and cheering you on just for being who you are. That's the experience of Pride!

Members of the sprOUT Toronto group which meets monthly at the 519 Centre, and their friends and supporters, were among the hundreds marching in this year's World Pride Parade on Sunday, June 29. Boas, flags, colourful attires and, of course, water guns were among the essentials as members prepared to march that hot afternoon. There was a vibrant presence from all three partner agencies: Griffin Centre, Vita, and Community Living Toronto.



Yes, we waited for two hours to march, and yes, the parade could have been shorter and better managed. Still, the experience was unforgettable, especially for those marching in the parade for the very first time. Scott (pictured) was among those representing our Association. The smile on his face as he marched down Yonge Street waving the rainbow-coloured CL Toronto flag said it all. It was indeed a Happy Pride!

## ANNOUNCEMENT: Prayer rooms at Community Living Toronto

Community Living Toronto recognizes the significance of prayer in religious practice and shall make reasonable efforts to accommodate an employee's requirement for daily prayer by providing an appropriate area within the location for an employee to pray. This may mean a quiet space in a meeting room, an empty office or any other room not in use, as determined by the Association. The Association shall provide signage that will indicate when the area that may be accessed for the purpose of prayer is in use. Through this, we hope that all staff who engage in daily prayer are able to incorporate their practice into their work day. If you have any questions, please contact your supervisor.

### Diversity Calendar

- Sept 23 ♦ Autumnal Equinox
- Sept 25-26 ♦ Rosh Hashanah (Jewish)
- Sept 25 ♦ Havaratri (Hindu)
- Oct 4 ♦ Yom Kippur (Jewish)
- Oct 4 ♦ Eid Al-Adha (Islamic)
- Oct 9-15 ♦ Sukkot (Jewish)
- Oct 17 ♦ Simchat Torah (Jewish)
- Oct 13 ♦ Thanksgiving Day
- Oct 20 ♦ Birth Of The Bab (Bahá'í)
- Oct 23 ♦ Diwali (Hindu)
- Oct 25 ♦ Muharram (Islamic)
- Oct 31 ♦ Halloween
- Nov 1 ♦ All Saints' Day (Christian)
- Nov 3 ♦ Ashura (Islamic)
- Nov 11 ♦ Remembrance Day
- Nov 12 ♦ Birth of Bahá'u'lláh (Bahá'í)
- Nov 16 ♦ Int'l Day of Tolerance
- Nov 26 ♦ Day of Covenant (Bahá'í)
- Nov 30 ♦ Advent (Christian)

**October is Women's History Month.**  
For more information visit the Status of Women Canada website:  
[www.swc-cfc.gc.ca](http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca)

THIS NEWSLETTER  
AND OTHER  
HELPFUL RESOURCES  
ARE AVAILABLE ON  
SHAREPOINT

### sprOUT Toronto

Peer group for LGBTQ people with an intellectual disability over the age of 18.

Meets every second Monday of the month at the 519 Church St. Community Centre 6 - 8 pm

To register:  
416-222-1153 ext. 138

