

Honouring Queer Newcomer Voices of Toronto: Building Capacity of Service Providers to Create a More Welcoming Scarborough

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Introduction

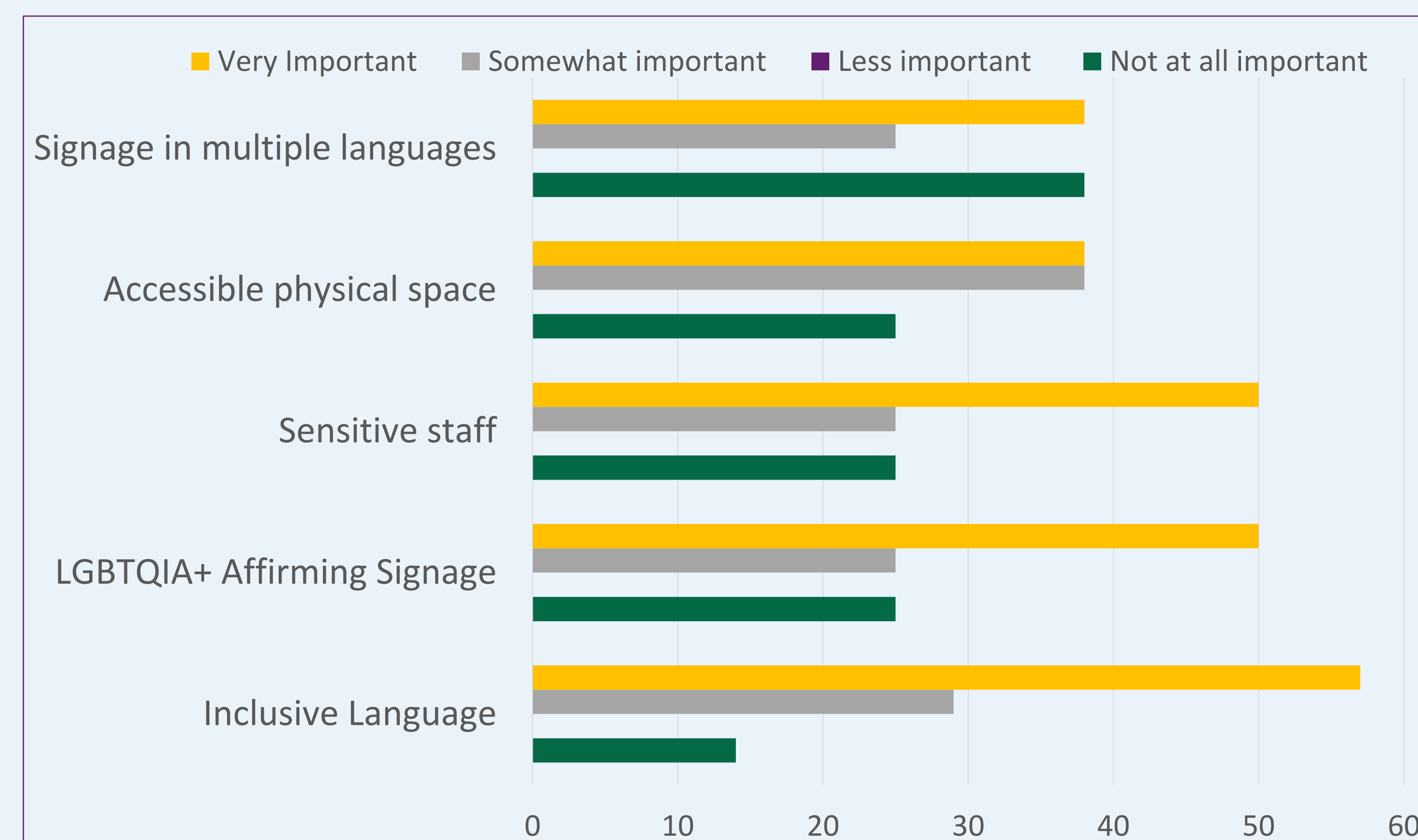
- The TEQ LIP identified a trend; LGBTQIA+ newcomers from Scarborough access settlement, support and community services in downtown Toronto.
- LGBTQIA+ newcomers typically originate from countries where they face overt discrimination, violence and persecution because of sexual orientation and gender identity¹.
- In Toronto they are at a high risk of mental health issues due to discrimination (hate crimes, violence, harassment) when accessing services (housing, employment, health)².
- Canada is taking a proactive approach to welcoming LGBTQIA+ newcomers through its expanding refugee sponsorship program³ and settlement funding⁴.
- The research set out to understand the effectiveness and accessibility of service provision through experiences of service users.

Methodology

- Exploratory research, predominantly qualitative design to gather stories and understand common experiences.
- Participatory community research approach. Tool design and execution completed in collaboration with TEQ LIP Health Action Group.
- Two surveys (33 service providers & 17 service users),
- Focus group (11 service users; length of stay in Canada 2 weeks – 3 years, av. 6 months).
- Open-ended questions to encourage storytelling.
- Closed questions to support specific service delivery recommendations.
- Focus group established with existing LGBTQIA+ newcomer support group; trauma-informed and accessible.
- Phenomenology used to establish themes among responses.

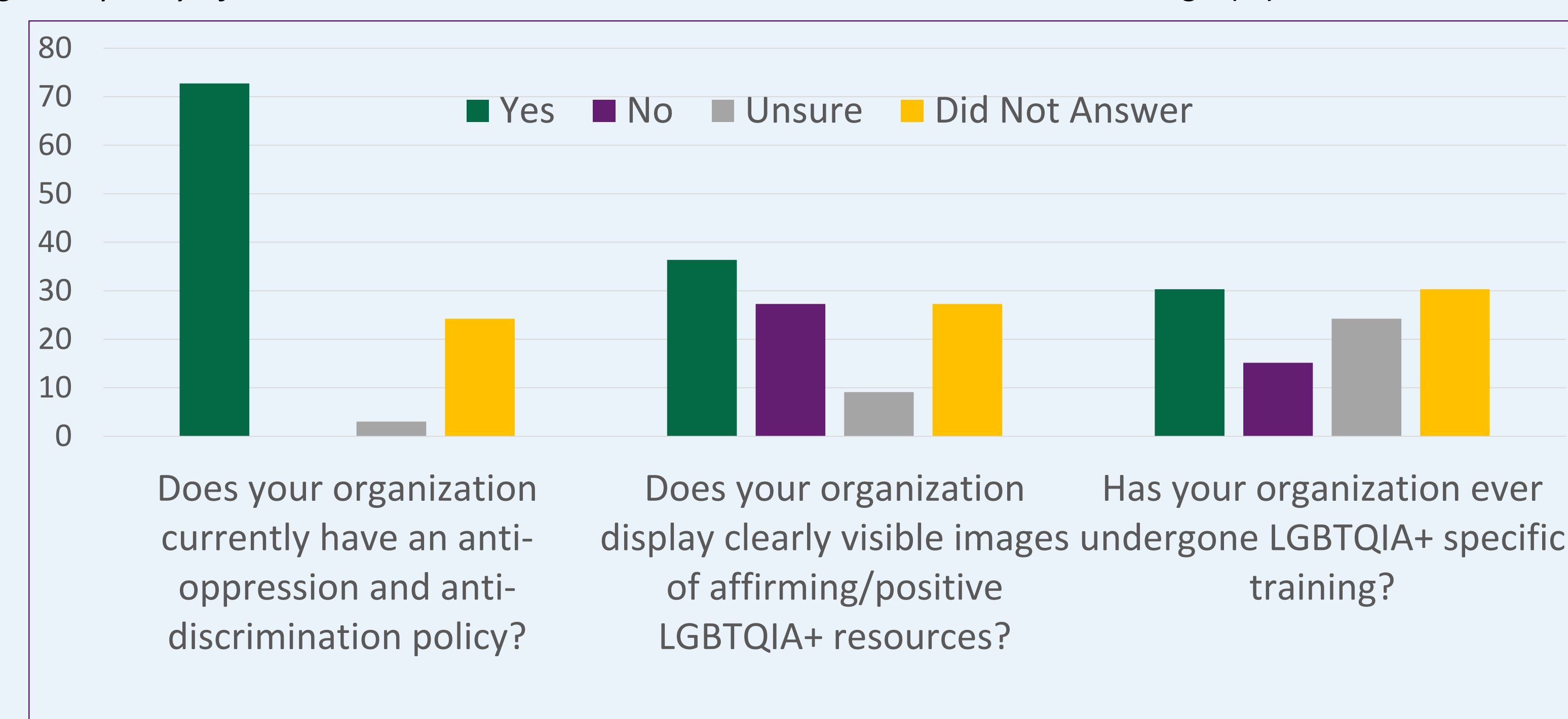
Results

Fig 1: Factors of comfort while using services for LGBTQIA newcomers in Scarborough (%)



When reviewing space for comfort levels when accessing services (figure 1), *Signage in Multiple Languages* was indicated as both *Not at all important* and *Very Important* (38%). Inclusive language was cited as the most important need (58%), closely followed by *LGBTQIA+ Affirming Signage* and *Sensitive Staff* (50%).

Fig 2: Capacity of Service Providers to Serve LGBTQIA+ Newcomers in Scarborough (%)



High numbers of service providers report (figure 2) being sure their organisation has an anti-oppression and anti-discrimination policy (72%). Approx. one third of organisations have undergone LGBTQIA+ specific training (30%), and display LGBTQIA+ affirming signage (36%).

“[They] referred to me as ‘he’ because of my paperwork.” (translation)
~ Woman focus group attendee on misuse of pronouns.

All focus group respondents said their top priorities were housing, updating ID to represent their sex and/ or gender identity, and finding work, closely followed by finding “genuine help” and “going to school”.

Results cont.

- 3 themes were highlighted across the responses for all three research tools:
1. Limited (access to) Safe and Comfortable Spaces (e.g. see figure 1).
 2. Split Identity; meeting one need (at a time) (e.g. see figure 2).
 3. Myths & Lack of Awareness (see focus group quote).

Discussion

- All three parts of the research demonstrate a range of experiences for both service user and service provider, and opportunities to build capacity in multiple areas, to address a list of needs based on priority.
- These opportunities can be divided into primary and secondary recommendations:
 - Primary - Targeted capacity building for service providers working to meet basic needs i.e. housing, health and employment.
 - Secondary - Support for allies through existing networks and tools to maintain capacity building and development of understanding of the intersecting needs of this community.
- The research was specifically designed to collate experiences of an underserved community; it’s important these voices are shared with intention and dignity.

Acknowledgements

- Thank you to the many members of the TEQ LIP Physical Health and Emotional Wellbeing Action Group for disseminating the surveys among its networks of community members and service providers.
- Particular thanks goes to the community members who participated in this research; for your openness to sharing your story.