

'Out' in the Country

The Importance of **Pride** in
Rural Communities and **Small Towns**



Report by **AJ Adams**





Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all of those with lived experience for sharing their honest and sometimes difficult-to-share experiences.

Also, to the rural Pride organizations for their assistance in disseminating the survey to the public.

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About

AJ Adams

AJ Adams (he/him) is an enthusiastic, passionate, and creative leader with a passionate commitment to social change and strategic communications.

With a Diploma in Public Relations and a Bachelor of Arts in Community Leadership and Equity, Diversity & Human Rights, AJ blends academic expertise with practical experience. Hailing from a small rural town in Ontario, AJ's upbringing provides a unique perspective, enabling him to authentically represent rural and small-town voices at the intersection with 2SLGBTQI issues.

AJ's advocacy journey gained momentum through a research study on **The Importance of Pride in Rural Communities and Small Towns** (this paper), propelling him into leadership roles within the 2SLGBTQI movement. As a presenter at various national, provincial, and local conferences, AJ shares insights garnered from his grassroots activism.

In late 2022, AJ became the Communications Manager for Egale Canada - Canada's leading organization for 2SLGBTQI people and issues. His impactful contributions extend beyond Egale Canada, including serving as the former president of Stratford-Perth Pride and former director of non-profit organizations like the Rural Ontario Institute, Stratford/Perth ShelterLink and more.

Furthermore, AJ's involvement in political campaigns and his creative prowess in branding and marketing campaigns for 2SLGBTQI organizations underscore his multifaceted dedication to advancing 2SLGBTQI rights and social justice.

Learn more about AJ at ajadams.ca



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Section 1

Summary



Research Findings: A Quick Glance

87%

of rural 2SLGBTQIA+ people have experienced some form of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate

Since the creation of Pride in their rural community,

33%

of respondents believe anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate has decreased

87%

of rural 2SLGBTQIA+ people feel more **supported** since the creation of Pride in their rural community

60%

of rural 2SLGBTQIA+ people feel personally more **safe** and/or **welcomed** in their rural town since the creation of Pride

96%

of rural 2SLGBTQIA+ people believe pride is needed in rural communities

72%

of rural 2SLGBTQIA+ people believe the existence of rural Pride would have eased the coming out journey of their younger selves

48%

of rural 2SLGBTQIA+ people believe that religious and/or social conservative values are the number one barrier for the rural 2SLGBTQIA+ community

Report Summary

“Out in the Country: The Importance of Pride in Rural Communities and Small Towns” research report presents compelling evidence of the transformative impact of Pride events within rural settings. The report explores the experiences of rural 2SLGBTQIA+ people and the impact of Pride (events, visuals and programming) on rural communities and small towns - and whether or not Pride belongs outside of Urban Centres. This research study was originally conducted in Fall 2021 and finalized in Spring 2024. The research participants (N = 3,160) were from 95 rural communities and small towns from all corners of Ontario - ensuring a wide-range of voices contributed to the study.

The findings of this study highlight the prevalence of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate experienced by 87% of rural 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, underscoring the persistent challenges faced by this community. However, a significant shift is observed with the introduction of Pride in these areas, as 33% of respondents perceive a decrease in such hostility, signaling a positive change in community attitudes.

Moreover, the report emphasizes the profound sense of support experienced by 87% of individuals following the establishment of Pride, indicating a critical role for these events in fostering a more inclusive and affirming environment. The overwhelming advocacy for Pride among rural 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, with 96% expressing its necessity, reflects a deep-seated recognition of its positive impact on community cohesion and individual well-being. Notably, the data reveals that 60% of respondents feel personally safer and more welcomed in their rural towns due to Pride, highlighting the tangible benefits of these events in enhancing feelings of acceptance and security.

Furthermore, 72% believe that having rural Pride would have significantly eased their coming out journey, demonstrating the pivotal role of community visibility and support. The report also identifies religious and/or social conservative values as the primary barrier for the rural 2SLGBTQIA+ community, emphasizing the need to address these challenges to ensure greater inclusivity and equality.

Overall, these insights underscore the vital and transformative role of Pride in rural communities and small towns, contributing to greater acceptance, support, and safety for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.



Defining Pride

2SLGBTQIA+ Pride refers to a sense of dignity, self-respect, and celebration of identity among individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, or any other sexual orientation or gender identity that falls within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Pride is often expressed through public events, parades, marches, and other activities that promote visibility, acceptance, and equality for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals and communities.

In this report, Pride in rural communities and small towns is defined by one of three ways and may be present in one or more ways in said rural areas.

Pride Events

Pride events includes and is not limited to the existence of Pride marches, parades, drag shows (including Drag Stoytime), community festivals, trivia nights and other entertainment-based events. In Canada, these events often take place from June to September (Pride Season) but some communities are creating “Winter Pride” taking place in January and February - with the purpose of creating year-round Pride in these rural towns (Ski Canada, 2018).



Pride Displays and Visuals

Pride displays and visuals may include but are not limited to the raising of Pride Flags, installation of rainbow crosswalks, murals, rainbow benches, lamp post banners and other visual displays that represent the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and/or other equity-deserving communities.

Pride Programming

Pride programming may include peer-support groups, Gender-Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) at local schools, 2SLGBTQIA+ social groups and other programming specifically for 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

Although needed, Pride programming is rare in rural communities due to financial, geographic and capacity constraints.



Section 2

Methodology



Section 3: Methodology

Research Design

This research study was conducted in Fall 2021 as a part of Laurentian University's Research Methods and Data Analysis (SOCI-2127EL) course under the supervision of Moria Ferguson, Professor of Sociology. My primary research questions were:

QUESTION ONE

What **barriers** do 2SLGBTQIA+ people face in rural communities and small towns?

QUESTION TWO

What **impact** does Pride have in rural communities and small towns?

QUESTION THREE

Is Pride **needed** in rural communities and small towns?

In this study, I developed a survey using SurveyMonkey with both open-ended and closed-ended questions and distributed it to individuals and Pride organizations in rural communities and small towns across Ontario. The survey was distributed through email communication, organic social media, paid social media advertising and word-of-mouth. The data was collected between September 2021 and November 2021.

Methods

1. Survey One: 2SLGBTQIA+ General Public

This survey primarily contained closed-ended questions using a five-point Likert scale to measure the impact of Pride on the lives of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals living in rural Ontario. Some questions in the questionnaire will have follow-up open-ended question for the participant to provide further information about their experience with rural Pride.

2. Survey Two: Non-2SLGBTQIA+ General Public

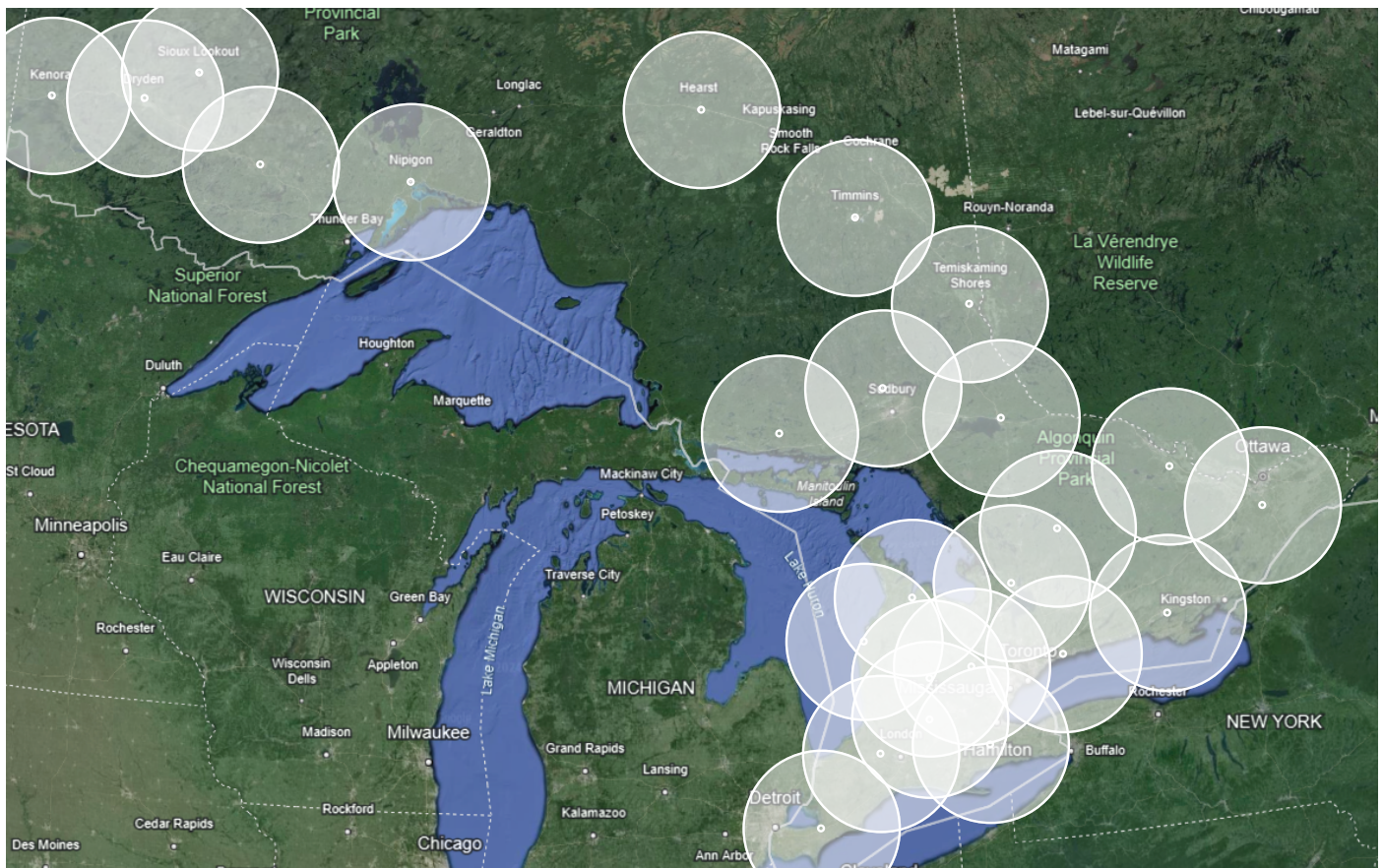
This survey primarily contained close-ended questions using a five-point Likert scale to measure the impact Pride has on the non-2SLGBTQIA+ individuals living in rural Ontario.

Some questions in the survey provided and spaced for follow-up open-ended question for the participant to provide further information about their experience with rural Pride.

Distribution, Collection and Promotion of Survey

The three surveys were distributed online to individuals and organizations in rural communities in every corner of Ontario. The survey was distributed through email communication, organic social media, paid social media advertising and word-of-mouth.

The first and second survey were promoted on Facebook and Instagram in the geographic areas of several identified rural Pride organizations.



Map A: White circles represent the approx. area where paid social media advertisements were run.

Demographics

Respondents of Survey One (n = 1,453) and Survey Two (n= 1,707) represent by a voice of 46% from non-heterosexuals and approximately 12% from trans and nonbinary individuals - see Figure 1 and Figure 2.

In Survey One and Two, representation is geographically diverse as well. 95 rural communities from all corners of Ontario are represented through this research. 77% of individuals have lived in their communities for five years or more.

Survey One: 2SLGBTQIA+ Respondents

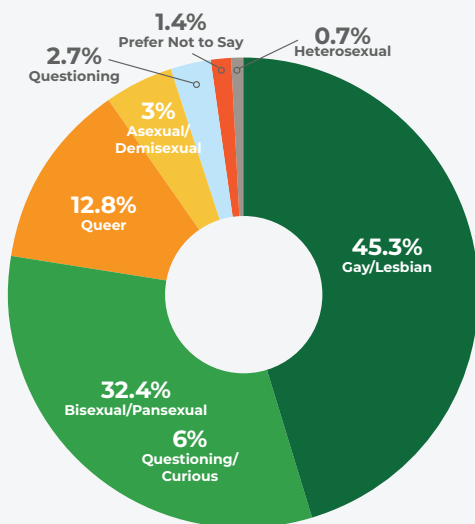


Figure A1: Breakdown of attraction of respondents in Survey One (n = 1,453)

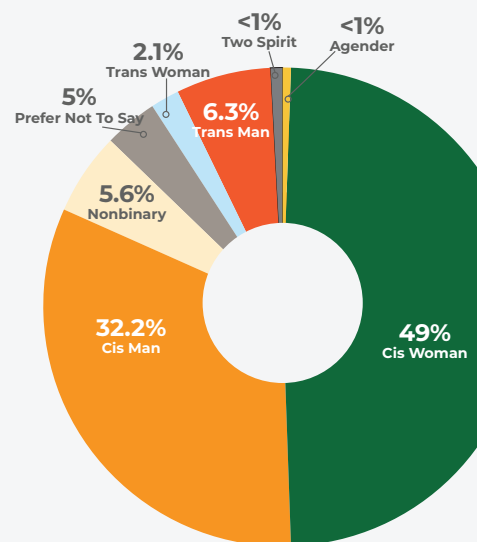


Figure A2: Breakdown of gender identity of respondents in Survey One (n = 1,453)

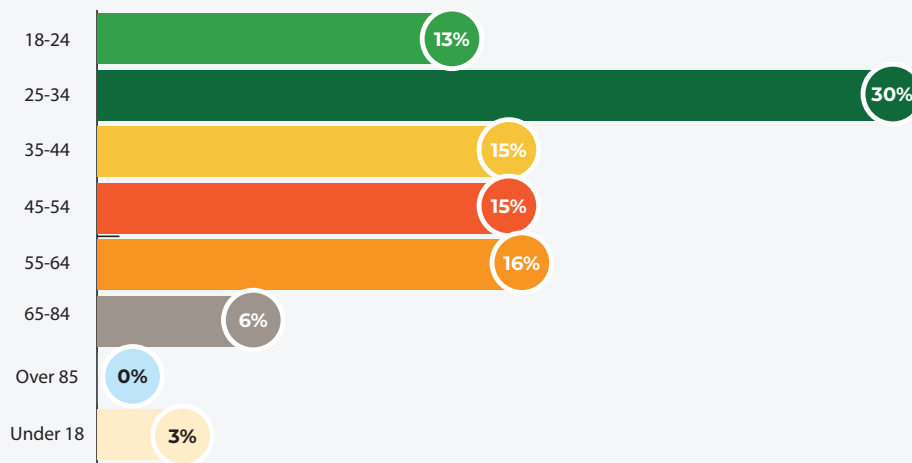


Figure A3: Breakdown of age of respondents in Survey One (n = 1,453)

Survey Two: Non-2SLGBTQIA+ Respondents

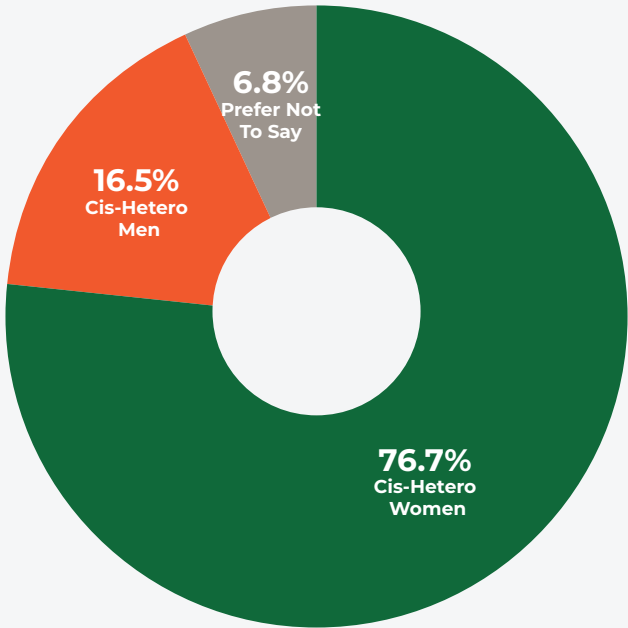


Figure B1: Breakdown of gender identity of respondents in Survey Two (n = 1,707)

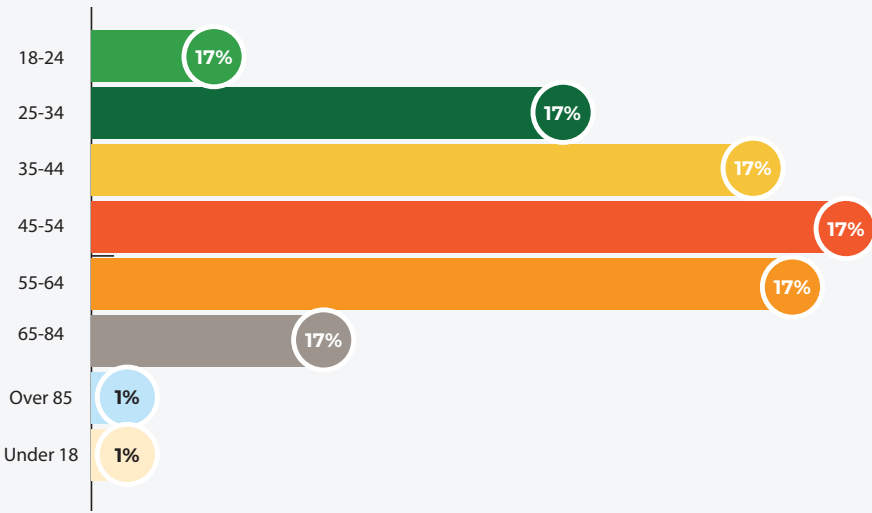


Figure B2: Breakdown of age in Survey Two (n = 1,707)



Section 3

Background



Introduction

In recent years, discussions about 2SLGBTQIA+ rights, representation, and visibility have gained increasing prominence in global discourse. While major urban centers often serve as focal points for 2SLGBTQIA+ activism and visibility, it's essential not to overlook the unique challenges and opportunities present in rural communities and small towns. This report delves into the critical role of 2SLGBTQIA+ Pride in rural areas, highlighting why such celebrations are not only necessary but also transformative for these communities.

Rural communities and small towns across the globe are often characterized by tight-knit social networks, strong community bonds, and deeply-rooted traditions (Henriquez, 2021). However, they can also be environments where 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals face heightened challenges related to social stigma, isolation, and limited access to support networks and resources. In many rural areas, 2SLGBTQIA+ identities may be met with silence, invisibility, or even hostility, making it difficult for individuals to express themselves authentically and access the support they need.

Against this backdrop, 2SLGBTQIA+ Pride emerges as a powerful force for change and inclusion in rural communities. Pride celebrations provide vital opportunities for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals to be visible, to celebrate their identities, and to connect with others who share similar experiences. These events serve as beacons of acceptance and solidarity, challenging stereotypes and fostering a sense of belonging that is essential for individual well-being and community cohesion.

Moreover, Pride in rural areas goes beyond mere celebration; it serves as a catalyst for education, awareness-raising, and advocacy. By bringing 2SLGBTQIA+ issues to the forefront of public discourse, Pride events in rural communities spark important conversations about acceptance, diversity, and inclusion. They provide platforms for community members to learn about 2SLGBTQIA+ experiences, confront prejudice, and work towards creating more supportive and equitable environments for all.

As we delve deeper into the significance of 2SLGBTQIA+ Pride in rural communities and small towns, it becomes clear that these celebrations are not just about visibility or symbolism; they are about empowerment, resilience, and progress. By embracing diversity and celebrating 2SLGBTQ+ identities, rural communities can unlock their full potential, becoming more inclusive, vibrant, and resilient places for all residents.



Challenges and Barriers in Rural Communities

Many individuals are attracted to live in rural areas for a variety of reasons. The slower pace, quieter surroundings, and close-knit communities found in these regions contribute to an enhanced quality of life (Annes, 2012). Additionally, rural living often comes with lower costs of living, making it more accessible for those on a budget. Residents value the strong sense of community and neighbourly bonds fostered in small towns and rural areas, along with the deep-rooted sense of heritage and tradition (Movement Advancement Project, 2019). Furthermore, rural living offers opportunities for self-sufficiency and independence, as well as an escape from the stressors of urban life, providing peace and tranquility amidst natural beauty (Annes, 2012). However, for 2SLGBTQIA+ wishing to live in rural communities and small towns are up against a variety of challenges and barriers.

Rural communities and small towns often serve as strongholds of traditional values and conservative beliefs, both politically and ideologically. In these areas, there is a deep-rooted adherence to traditional norms and customs, which can manifest in resistance to progressive ideas and social reforms - including the acceptance and inclusion of 2SLGBTQIA+ people. Moreover, the demographic makeup of rural communities tends to include a higher proportion of social conservatives, individuals who prioritize maintaining traditional social structures and resist change. This demographic skew is often reflected in local political representation and policymaking, further reinforcing conservative ideologies - ideologies that often work against 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion.

Additionally, rural areas typically have a higher percentage of residents who identify as Christians compared to urban centres. In Canada (and the Western World) Christianity often plays a significant role in shaping cultural norms, values, and community dynamics within these areas (McDermott et al, 2015). As a result, Christian beliefs and teachings may influence social attitudes and behaviours, including views on issues related to gender, sexuality, and family structures (Henriquez, 2021).

Rural communities often face significant challenges in accessing healthcare and social services, particularly when it comes to specialized care for marginalized populations such as the 2SLGBTQIA+ community (Henriquez, 2021). In many rural areas, the availability of healthcare providers and facilities is limited, leading to longer wait times, reduced options for treatment, and increased barriers to accessing essential services. This issue is exacerbated when it comes to accessing gender-affirming care, mental health support, and other services specific to the needs of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals (Henriquez, 2021).

Finding healthcare professionals who are knowledgeable about and sensitive to the unique healthcare needs of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community can be particularly challenging in rural areas, where attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity may be more conser-

vative or uninformed (. As a result, many rural 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals are forced to travel long distances, often hours away, to urban centres where they can access the most basic of services, such as hormone therapy, counseling, or even just finding a doctor who is 2SLGBTQIA+-friendly and affirming. This lack of access not only imposes financial and logistical burdens on individuals but also contributes to feelings of isolation, discrimination, and unequal treatment within the healthcare system. Addressing these disparities in healthcare access and ensuring the provision of inclusive, culturally competent services in rural areas is crucial to promoting the health and well-being of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Furthermore, rural populations tend to be less diverse and more homogeneous compared to urban areas in terms of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Movement Advancement Project, 2019). This homogeneity can contribute to a lack of exposure to differing perspectives and experiences, potentially reinforcing conservative attitudes and limiting opportunities for meaningful dialogue and understanding across diverse identities.

Many 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals rely on the social and community offerings of urban environments and experiences before becoming their true and out selves. Across the world, rural societies provide a strong sense of community, less anonymity than urban settings, and affordable housing (among other aspects) whereas, cities typically provide many cultural and social elements for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and offer a vast array of services and supports – specifically for those in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Lastly, social change in rural communities often occurs at a slower pace compared to urban centres. The tight-knit nature of these communities, coupled with a strong attachment to tradition and a resistance to external influence, can impede the adoption of progressive values and practices. Consequently, initiatives aimed at promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion such as Pride may face greater challenges in rural areas, requiring careful consideration of local contexts and community engagement strategies.

Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Hate

In contemporary societies, the discourse surrounding sexuality and gender identity has evolved significantly, reflecting both progress and persistent challenges. While strides have been made towards fostering inclusivity and acceptance, manifestations of prejudice and discrimination persist in the form of homophobia, transphobia, and related forms of hate speech. These attitudes and behaviours not only undermine the rights and dignity of individuals but also pose significant barriers to societal cohesion and progress.

Homophobia, characterized by negative attitudes, prejudice, and discriminatory behaviours towards individuals who identify as homosexual or are perceived as such, remains prevalent across various cultural and social contexts. Despite advancements in



legal protections and increased visibility of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, manifestations of homophobia persist in both overt and covert forms, perpetuating systemic inequalities and marginalization.

Similarly, transphobia, which encompasses prejudice, discrimination, and violence directed towards transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, reflects deep-seated biases and misconceptions about gender identity. Transgender individuals often face heightened levels of discrimination and violence, both within societal institutions and interpersonal interactions, leading to profound social and psychological consequences.

Furthermore, anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate encompassing derogatory language, incitement to violence, and dissemination of harmful stereotypes, exacerbates the impact of homophobia and transphobia by normalizing and perpetuating prejudiced attitudes.

Understanding the rural experiences of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate is essential for devising effective strategies to combat prejudice and promote inclusivity outside of urban communities.

Pride in Rural Communities and Small Towns

Pride plays a crucial role in addressing and combating anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate by providing visible and empowering platforms for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals and allies to stand together against discrimination and prejudice. Through colourful parades, vibrant celebrations, meaning displays, and advocacy efforts, Pride challenges societal norms and promote acceptance, understanding, and respect for diverse gender and sexual identities.

Additionally, Pride fosters a profound sense of safety and community support for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, offering spaces where they can express themselves authentically without fear of judgment or harm. The solidarity and camaraderie experienced during Pride events help to strengthen bonds within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and affirm the value of mutual support and allyship.

Moreover, Pride contributes to fostering both internal and external acceptance, empowering individuals to embrace their identities with Pride and confidence while encouraging broader societal acceptance and recognition of 2SLGBTQIA+ rights and dignity. As a result, Pride serves as a catalyst for positive social change, inspiring individuals and communities to work towards a more inclusive and equitable world for all.

Pride in rural communities is immensely significant for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, providing a crucial sense of safety and belonging. In rural areas where acceptance and visibility of 2SLGBTQIA+ identities may be limited, Pride offers a unique opportunity for community members to come together in solidarity and support.

These events and displays create a visible presence of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals and allies, challenging stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive environment. Attending Pride in a rural setting can be especially empowering, demonstrating that there are others like them in their community and combating feelings of isolation and fear. Overall, rural Pride events significantly enhance the sense of safety and for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, reaffirming their right to live openly and free from discrimination.

Known Permanent Pride Visuals

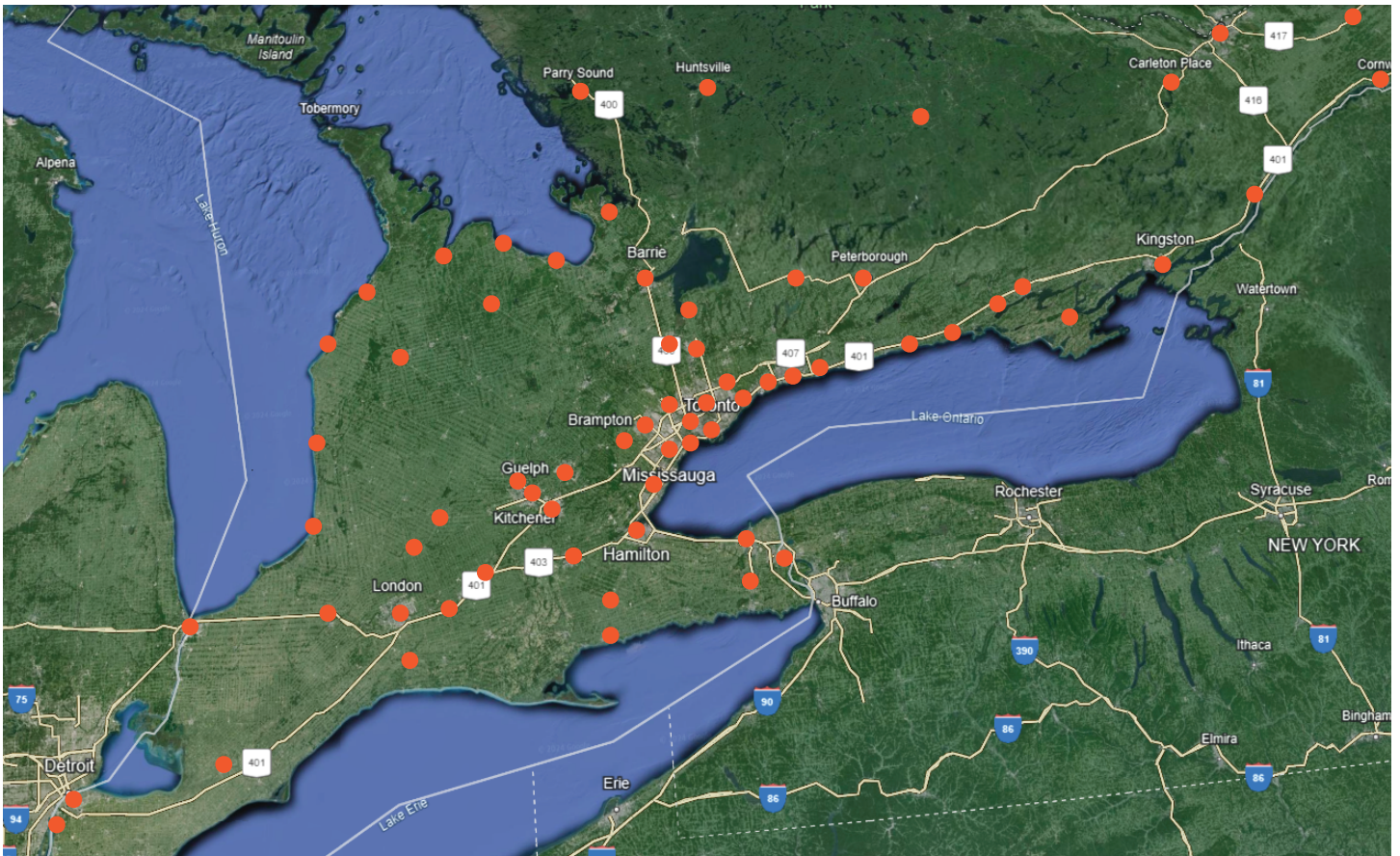
In September 2021, over 60 municipalities in Ontario had one or more permanent Pride visual - a rainbow crosswalk. Rainbow crosswalks serve as powerful symbols of 2SLGBTQIA+ visibility, inclusion, and acceptance within communities. By painting crosswalks in the colors of the rainbow flag, which has long been recognized as a symbol of 2SLGBTQIA+ Pride and solidarity, cities and towns demonstrate their commitment to supporting and celebrating diversity.

These colourful crosswalks not only beautify urban landscapes but also send a clear message of solidarity and support to 2SLGBTQIA+ residents, visitors, and allies. Rainbow crosswalks serve as physical reminders of the importance of equality, tolerance, and respect for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Additionally, they can spark conversations about 2SLGBTQIA+ rights and issues, promote awareness and understanding, and contribute to the creation of safer and more inclusive public spaces. Overall, just as important as Pride events, rainbow crosswalks play a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging and community Pride while challenging discrimination and prejudice.

Although not a full solution, permanent Pride visuals like rainbow crosswalks can help solve the issue of Pride needing to be around 365 days a year.





Map B: Red dots represent known rainbow crosswalk and other permanent Pride displays in southern Ontario.



Section 4

Research Findings: **Rural 2SLGBTQIA+** **Challenges & Barriers**



Challenges and Barriers

When asked about the largest barrier faced by the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in rural areas, respondents identified several significant challenges.

The most commonly cited barrier, with 43% of 2SLGBTQIA+ respondents ($n = 625$), was the prevalence of religious and social conservative values, which can create an environment of intolerance and hinder acceptance.

Additionally, 19% ($n = 276$) pointed to the remoteness to 2SLGBTQIA+ related services as a major obstacle, as rural communities often lack accessible resources and support networks.

17% of 2SLGBTQIA+ respondents ($n = 247$) highlighted the lack of diversity in rural areas, which can lead to feelings of isolation and limited understanding of diverse identities.

16% ($n = 232$) believe that the small population in these areas contributes to the difficulties faced by the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, as it can be harder to find a supportive peer group.

Finally, 5% ($n = 73$) of respondents felt that all of these factors combined create substantial barriers for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in rural communities and small towns.

This section presents the research findings of primary research question one:

QUESTION ONE

What **barriers** do 2SLGBTQIA+ people face in rural communities and small towns?

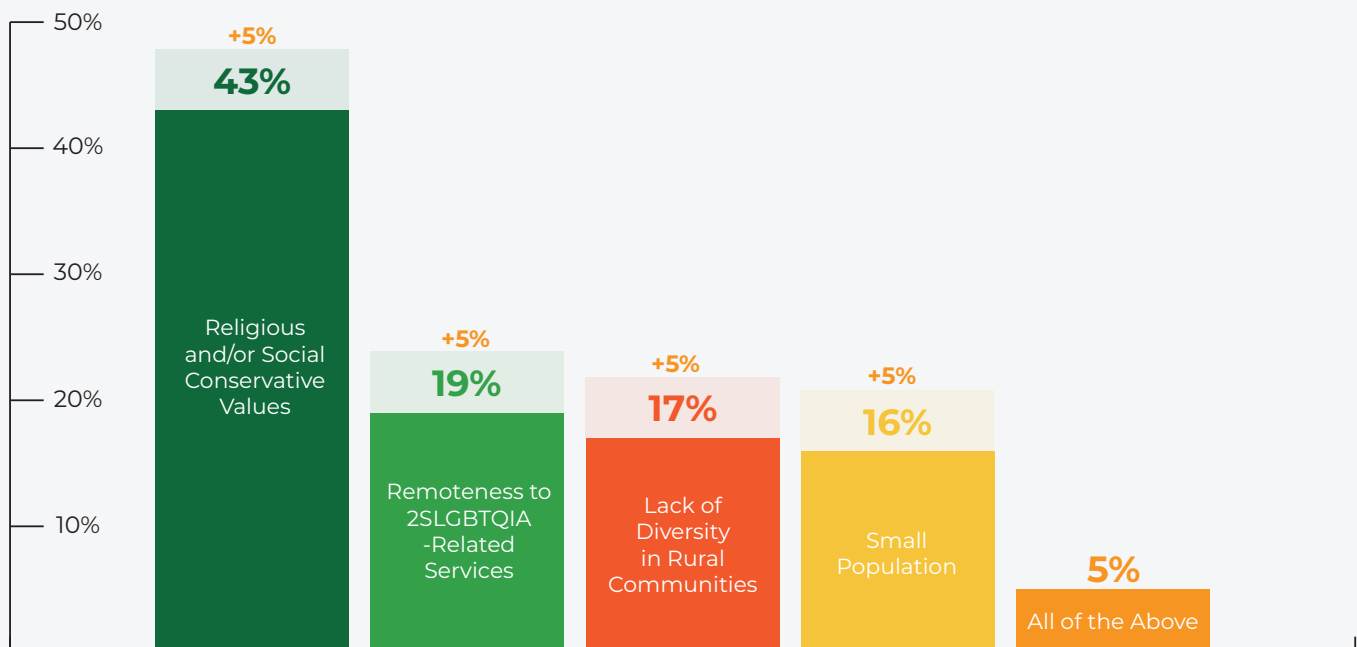


Figure 4: What is the largest barrier the 2SLGBTQIA+ community faces in rural communities?

Barriers for Rural 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth

Research participants were also asked **what barriers exist in rural communities for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth in feeling safe and comfortable to come out?**

The following themes were identified as gaps in the offerings in rural communities:

Lack of education about the 2SLGBTQIA+ community

Education for the general public to learn more about the 2SLGBTQIA+ community

Lack safe spaces, activities, and programing for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth to network (e.g. peer groups)

Lack of 2SLGBTQIA+ specific social services (such as counselling, physical health, sexual health and mental health)

Lack of role models, mentors and community leaders (e.g. politicians and teachers) who openly/publicly identify as 2SLGBTQIA+



Experiences of Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ in Rural Communities

Research participants were asked about their direct and indirect experience when it comes to anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate. Direct being the victim of this hate and indirect being a witness of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate.

The research found that 92% of all respondents ($n = 2,907$) have witnessed some form of anti-2SLGBTQIA hate in their rural community - and 87% of rural 2SLGBTQIA+ people ($n = 1,264$) have directly experienced anti-2SLGBTQIA hate against themselves.

In both direct and indirect experiences, the workplace was a top location of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate with nearly a quarter of respondents ($n = 695$) reporting anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate occurring at places of employment.

Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate also appears to commonly occur in public. 26% ($n = 378$) of have witnessed anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate on the street of their rural communities - and 20% of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals ($n = 291$) have experienced anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate in public.



2SLGBTQIA+ Respondents

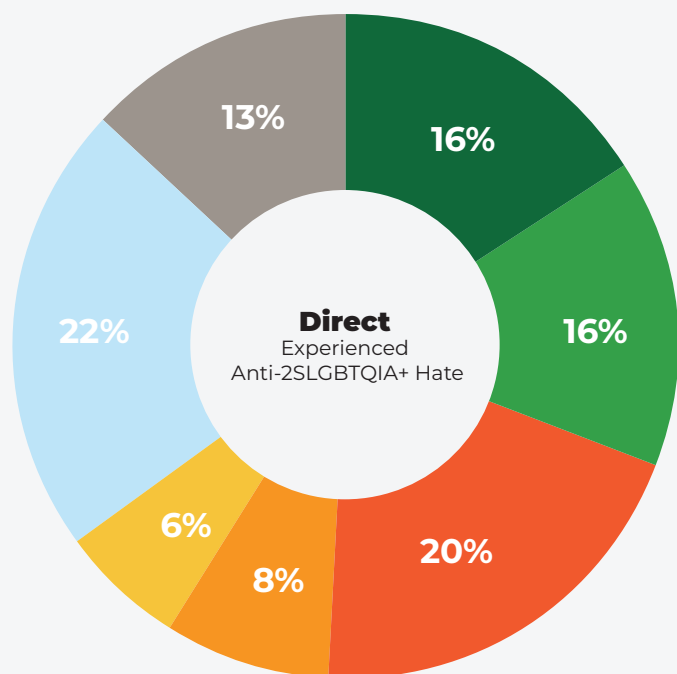


Figure 5: Have you DIRECTLY / PERSON-ALLY experienced anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate in your rural town/community? ($n = 1,453$)

All Respondents

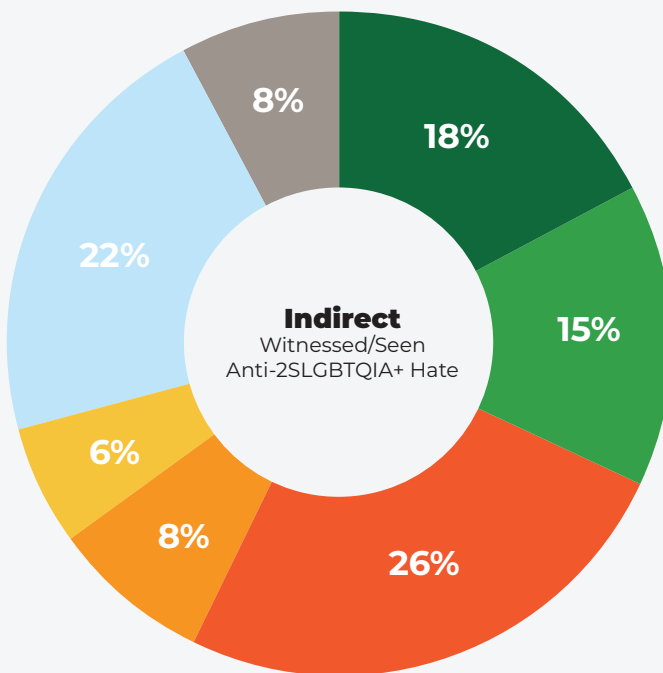


Figure 6: Have you IN-DIRECTLY experienced (witnessed) anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate in your rural town/community? ($N = 3,160$)

Section 5

Research Findings: **Impact of Pride in Rural Communities and Small Towns**



The Impact of Pride in Rural Communities and Small Towns

Pride serves as a catalyst for positive social change, inspiring individuals and communities to work towards a more inclusive and equitable world for all. This section will explore the impact on Pride in rural communities and small towns in three areas:

- Impact on Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Hate
- Impact on Sense of Safety & Community Support
- Impact on Acceptance (Internal & External)

This section presents the research findings of primary research question two:

QUESTION TWO

What **impact** does Pride have in rural communities and small towns?

Impact on Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Hate

Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate, encompassing prejudice, discrimination, and violence directed towards Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, or other non-normative gender or sexual identities, represents a persistent and pervasive threat to the safety, well-being, and dignity of diverse communities worldwide.

As mentioned earlier in this report, 87% of rural 2SLGBTQIA+ Ontarians (n = 1,264) stated they have experienced some form of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate. Which begs the questions, **does the existence of Pride make any kind of impact on this anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate?**

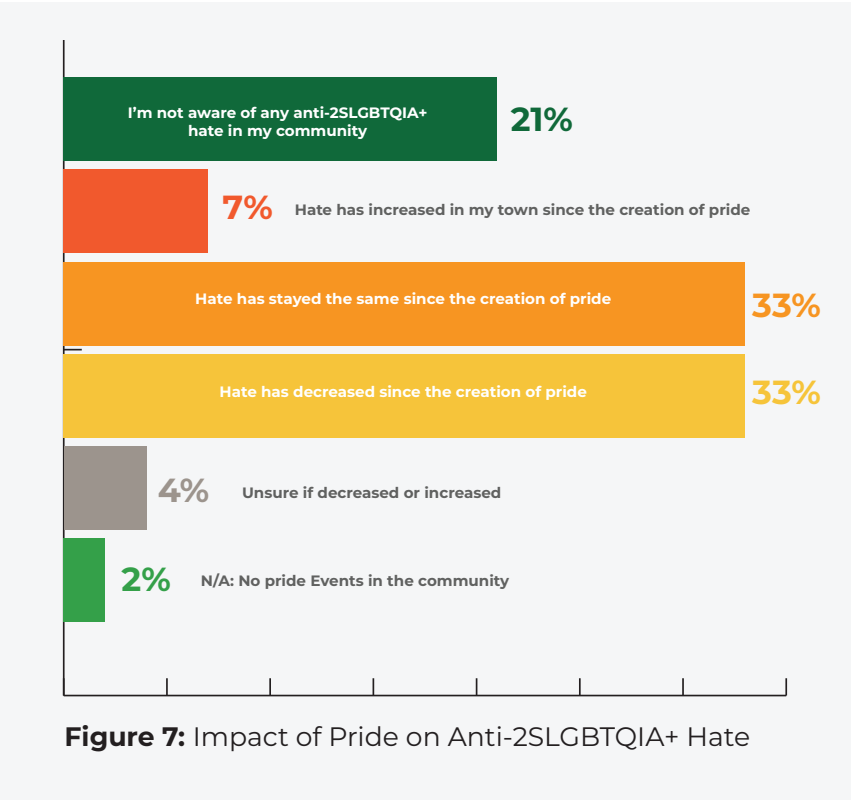


Figure 7: Impact of Pride on Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Hate

Research reveals that 33% of respondents (n = 1,043) believe Pride has created a decrease in hate in their communities, with an additional 33% (n = 1,043) believing the Pride events have not improved nor worsen hate with their rural town.

7% of respondents (n = 221) believe that the existence of Pride in their small town has increased anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate.

Impact on Sense of Safety and Community Support

2SLGBTQIA+ individuals want to feel safe and accepted as who they are – however for those living in rural communities, the experience of self-acceptance and coming out may be delayed or prevented due to varying aspects of rural life.

So how do rural Ontario communities compare to their urban counterparts in terms of provide a place of safety and support for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community?

60% of 2SLGBTQIA+ respondents (*n* = 872) feel personally more supported, safe and/or welcomed in their rural town since the creation of Pride in their rural town. **See Figure 8.**

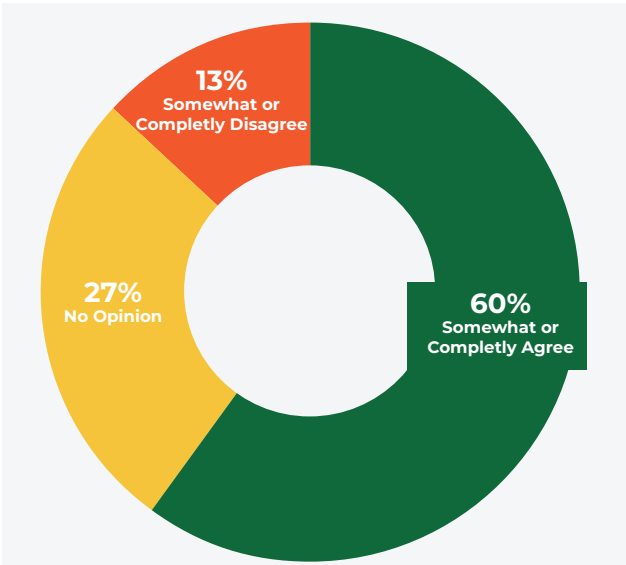


Figure 8: Since Pride was created in your town, as a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, do you personally feel more supported/safe/ welcomed in your town?

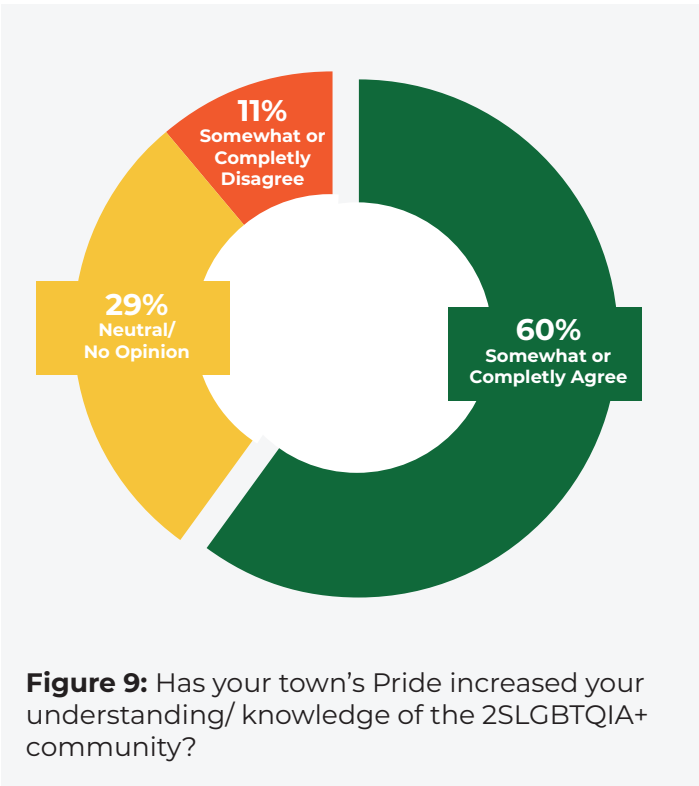


Figure 9: Has your town’s Pride increased your understanding/ knowledge of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community?

Increased understanding and knowledge of the 2SLGBTQIA+ from non-2SLGBTQIA+ individuals can be an explanation for the improved senses of safety and support. 60% of respondents (*n* = 1,886) believe the creation of Pride in their rural town has increased their understanding of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. **See Figure 9.**

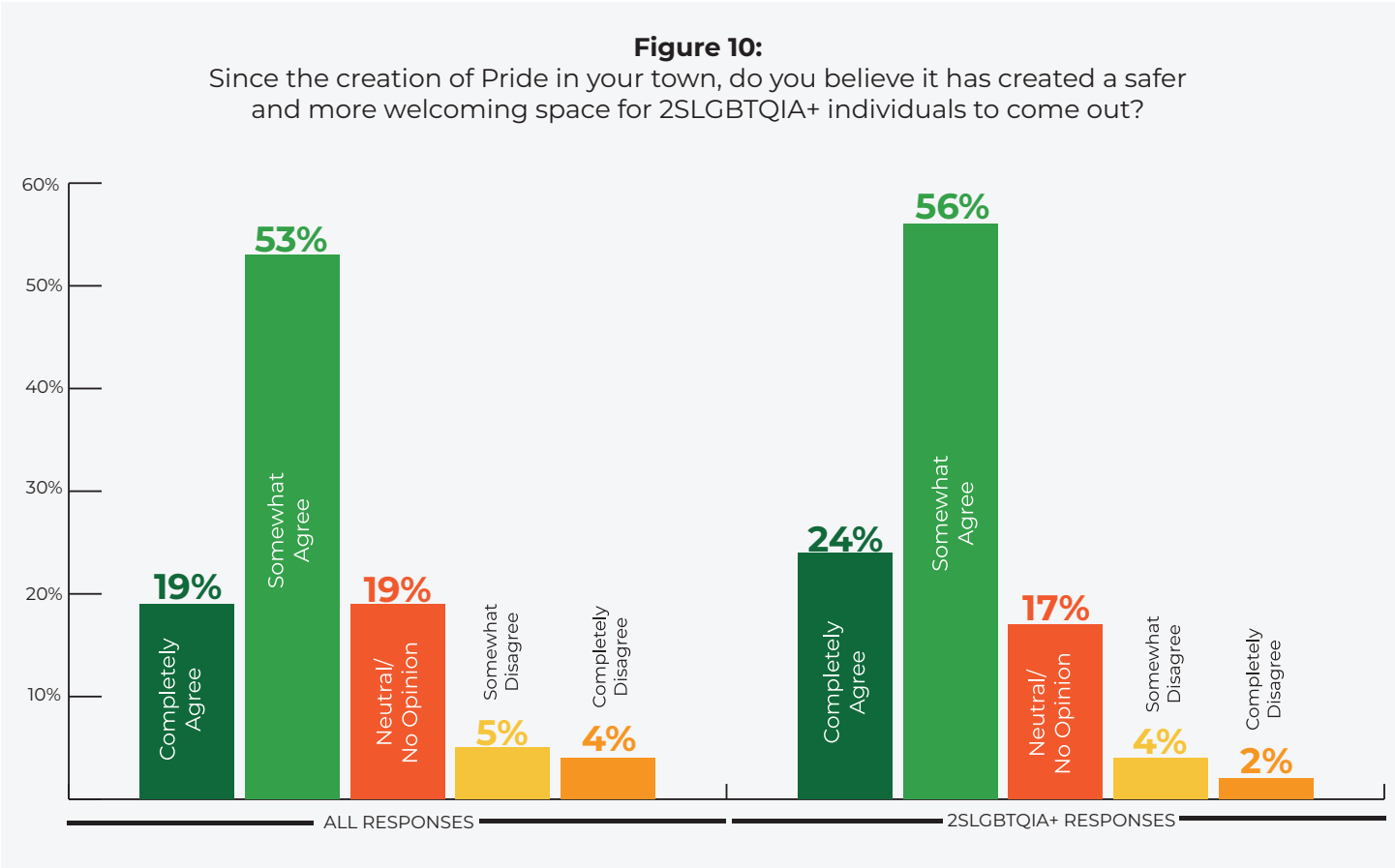
Themes of knowledge gains from this survey include terminology, history of 2SLGBTQIA+ rights and/or challenges and barriers that the 2SLGBTQIA+ community faces on a day-to-day basis.



All respondents were asked if they believe since the creation of Pride in their town, has **created a safer and more welcoming space for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals to come out?**

Nearly three-fourths or 72% (n = 2,275) agree this to be true – and 80% of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals (n = 1,162) agree Pride has created safer environments in rural communities for individuals to come out.

Only 9% of all respondents (n = 284) and 6% of 2SLGBTQIA+ respondents (n = 87) somewhat disagree or completely disagree that since the creation of Pride in their town, it has created a safer and more welcoming space for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals to come out.



Impact on Acceptance (Internal and External)

As Pride events are a newer addition to rural communities, respondents were asked If their town's Pride was around when they were younger, do they believe it would have eased (directly or indirectly) their coming out journey?

72% of 2SLGBTQIA+ respondents ($n = 1,046$) stated that Pride would have eased the coming out journey of their younger selves – whether directly or indirectly.

Coming out is not a one-off event – 2SLGBTQIA+ people may have to come out many times during their lives, as they move, change jobs, make new friends, join a club or sports league. Coming out is a very individual journey and 2SLGBTQIA+ people may face different challenges when coming out. This journey is unique for each individual and current literature indicates the many rural and small town 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals wait until they reach independence from their parents and leave their small hometown before they come out.

The question however remains for those 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals who are out in the rural community or small town, how public are they with their identity?

Contrary to popular perception, the majority (55%) of 2SLGBTQIA+ respondents ($n = 727$) reported they are completely out in their networks (family, friends, coworkers, etc.) and only 6% of individuals ($n = 87$) reported they are still in the closet. 38% of individuals ($n = 552$) report they are out but not fully.

See Figure 13.

Many respondents noted that their degree of being out depends on the circumstance and their feeling of safety in the environment such as their home, friend group,

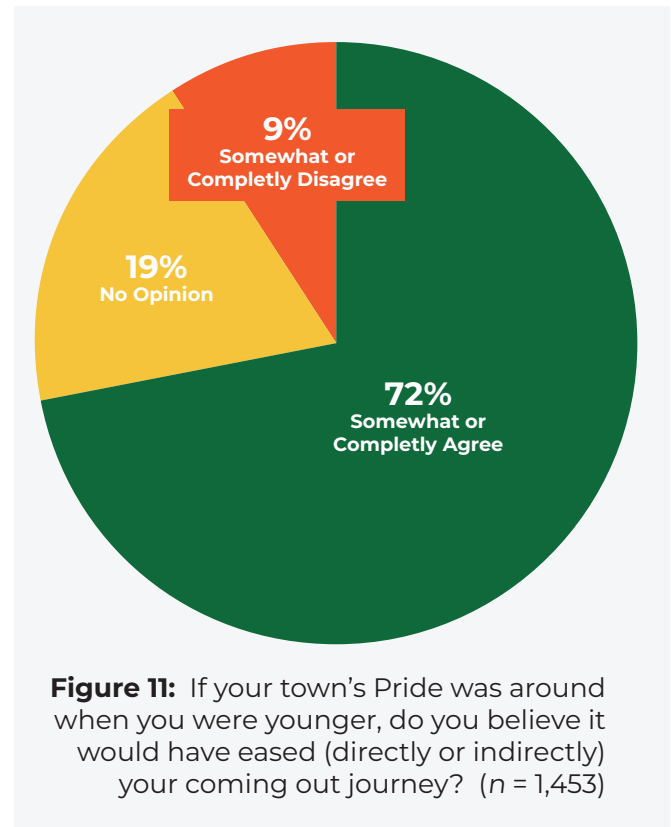


Figure 11: If your town's Pride was around when you were younger, do you believe it would have eased (directly or indirectly) your coming out journey? ($n = 1,453$)

Coming out is a gradual process or a journey, it is meant to include becoming aware of and acknowledging one's gender identity, gender expression, or non-hetero-normative sexual orientation or attraction.

Closeted and **in the closet** are adjectives for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals who have not disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity and aspects thereof, including sexual identity and sexual behaviour.

URBAN CITY

19%

As an adult
(18+) living in
a city

23%

At college/
university
(in a city)

13%

As a youth
(under 18)
living in a city

RURAL TOWN

16%

As an adult
(18+) living in a
rural town

25%

As a youth
(under 18)
living in a rural
town

NOT OUT

4%
Not Out

Figure 12: When did you first come out (in part or full)?

workplace, place of worship, and others.

For those rural Ontarians who are out, it is important to understand at what point in their lives they felt safe and comfortable to come out - whether in part or in full. 38% of 2SLGBTQIA+ rural Ontarians ($n = 552$) came out during their youth (under the age of 18). Although 41% of individuals ($n = 596$) felt their rural community was a safe place to come out only a quarter of respondents ($n = 347$) came out during their teens while in rural Ontario - and an additional 23% of individuals ($n = 334$) waited until they left home and were

Interestingly, 92% of cis-hetero individuals ($n = 1,570$) stated they would feel safe to come out if they were 2SLGBTQIA+. **See Figure 14.** This question opens up a path for a deeper conversation around the knowledge and understanding of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and the privilege that comes with being straight and/or cisgender.

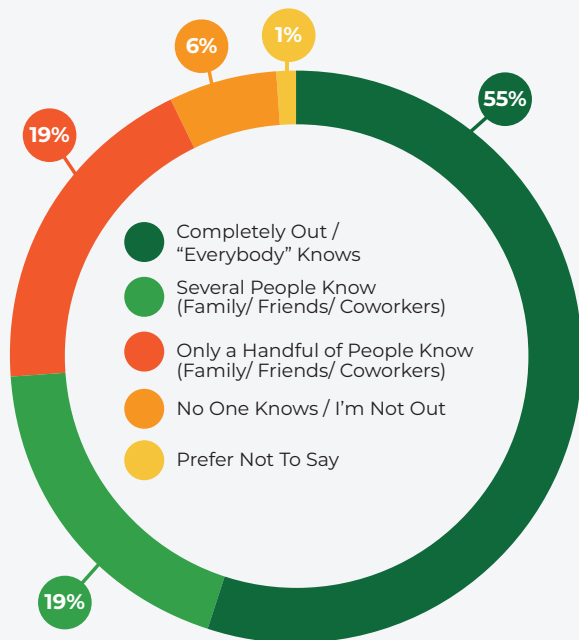


Figure 13: As an 2SLGBTQIA+ person living in rural Ontario, how public are you with your 2SLGBTQIA+ identity? ($n = 1,453$)

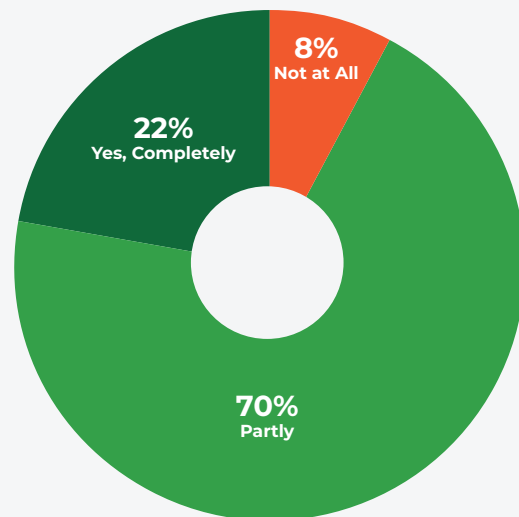
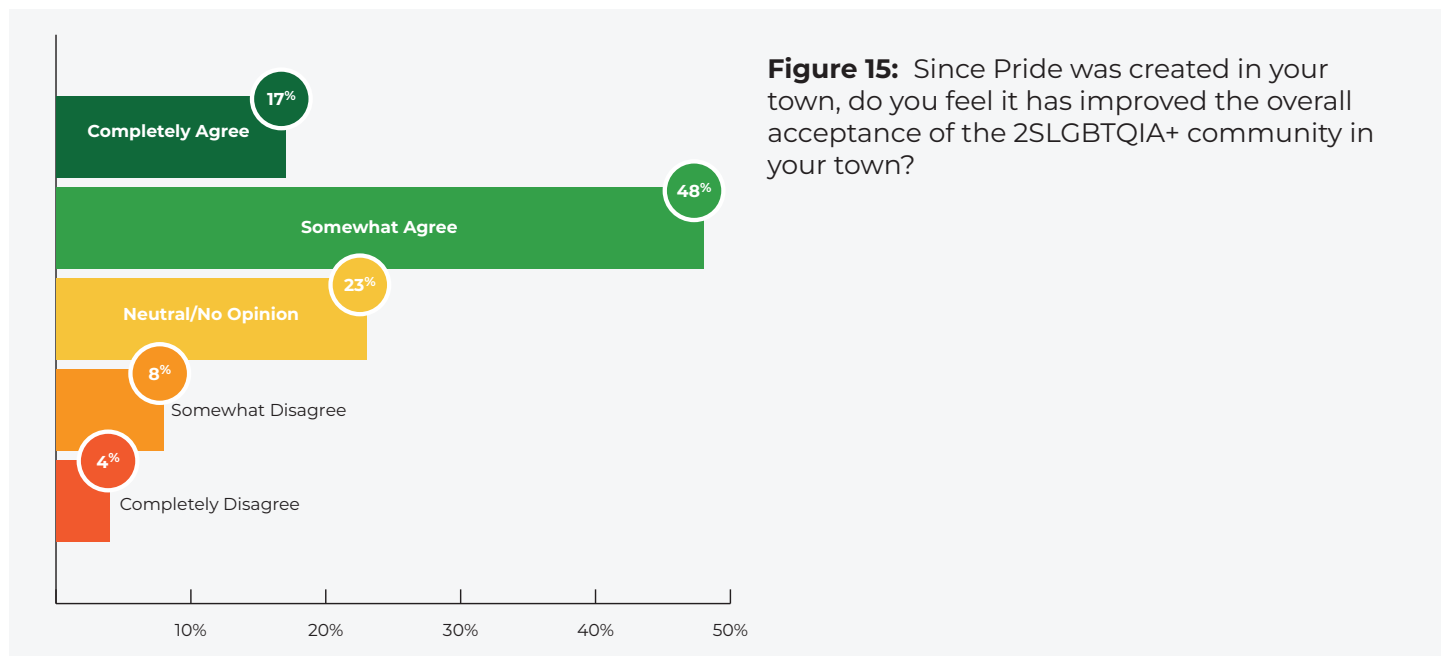


Figure 14: If you were 2SLGBTQIA+, would you feel safe to come-out in your rural town? ($n = 1,707$)

When asked on whether since the creation of Pride in their town, has created has improved the overall acceptance of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, residents responded with varying levels of agreement.

A total of 17% ($n = 537$) completely agreed that it has had a positive impact, while 48% somewhat agreed ($n = 1,517$). Conversely, 8% ($n = 253$). somewhat disagreed, and 4% completely disagreed ($n = 126$) - indicating some division in perceptions regarding the influence of Pride on community acceptance.

Additionally, 23% of respondents ($n = 727$). were neutral or had no opinion on the matter.



Section 6

Research Findings: **The Need for Pride in Rural Communities and Small Towns**



Rural Perspectives on Rural Pride

Many small communities in rural Canada are forming their own Pride organizations and events and raising the profile of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals outside of urban communities (Clarke, 2019).

We have already explored the results on the impact of Pride events, but **do those living in these rural communities and small towns see a need for Pride events and organizations?**

Overall, 92% of rural Ontarians ($n = 2,907$) see a need for Pride in their communities, with 96% of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals ($n = 1,395$) stating a need for Pride in rural communities and small towns.

This section presents the research findings of primary research question three:

QUESTION THREE

Is Pride **needed** in rural communities and small towns?

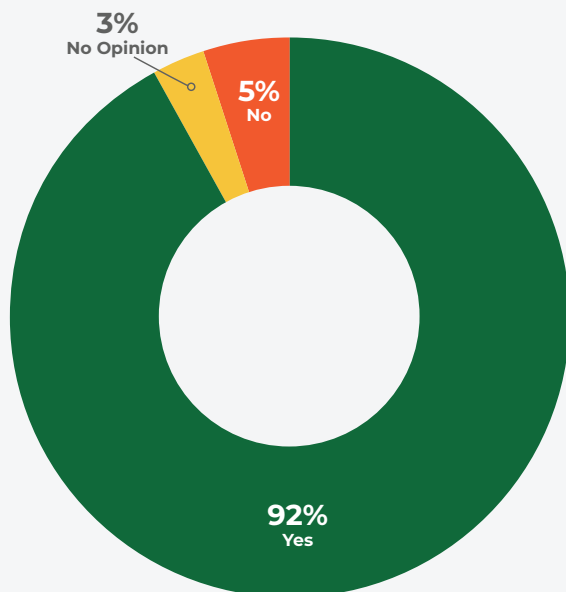


Figure 16a: Do you believe Pride events/displays/organizations are needed in rural Ontario? ($N = 3,160$)

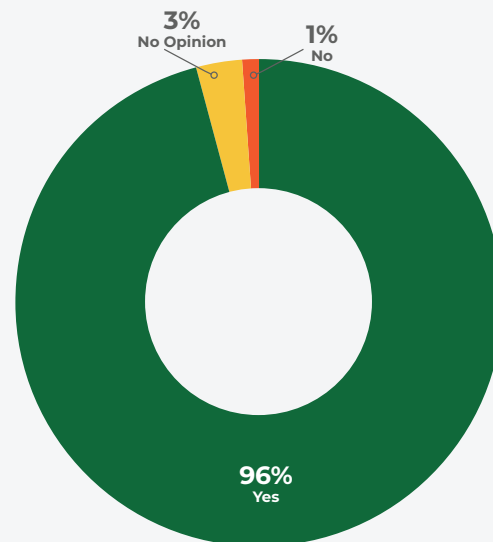


Figure 16b: 2SLGBTQIA+ responses ($n = 1,453$)

Pride in rural areas is not just about visibility.

It's about affirming the rights and dignity of all individuals, regardless of where they live.

- Research Participant

Everyone wants to feel included and welcome in their town but for those in marginalized communities such as 2SLGBTQIA+ it is essential.

Have Pride events and organizations been successful in making 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals have a stronger sense of inclusion and community living in rural Ontario?

The answer is yes, they have.

2SLGBTQIA+ individuals overwhelmingly stated that Pride organizations had a positive impact on their lives. 80% of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals (n = 1,162) agree Pride events have created safer environments in rural communities for individuals to come out. Pride is important for many reasons and this research shows that there is not one clear reason for why someone believes it is important - see Figure 17. Rural 2SLGBTQIA+ Ontarians also share similar views to the general public. The only difference is that 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals view increasing visibility as a slightly more prevalent importance of Pride.

What is interesting is that this research revealed that a quarter (n = 363) of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals came out (in full or in part) in their youth while living in rural Ontario. That being said 72% of 2SLGBTQIA+ respondents stated that Pride would have eased the coming out journey of their younger selves – whether directly or indirectly. It would be worth researching coming out journeys of rural vs. urban 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals. See future research section on page 38.

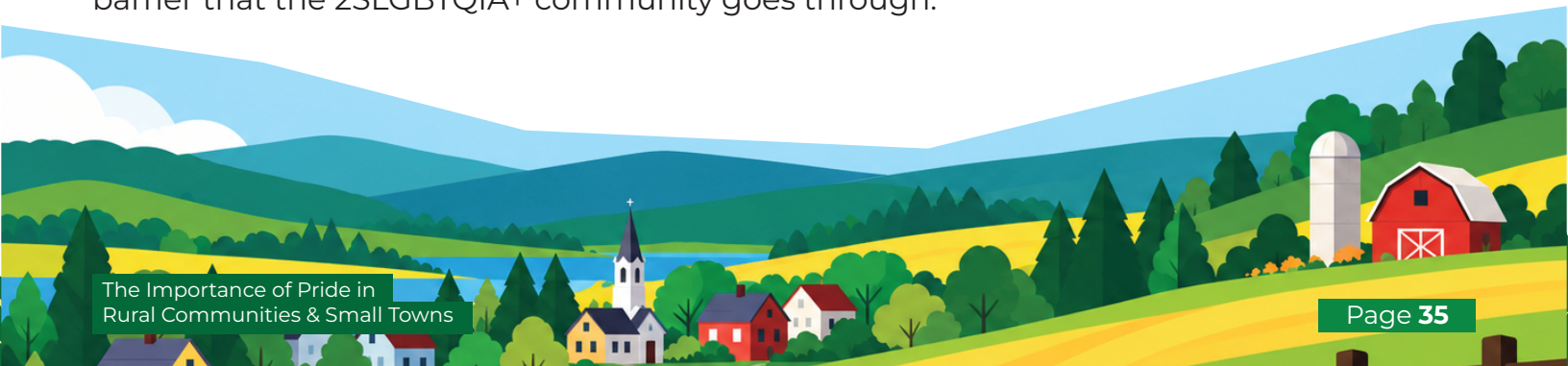
Response	%
Strengthens and Unifies the Town/Community	19%
Celebrates Diversity	22%
Educates the Public	20%
Increases Visibility	19%
Increases Awareness	20%

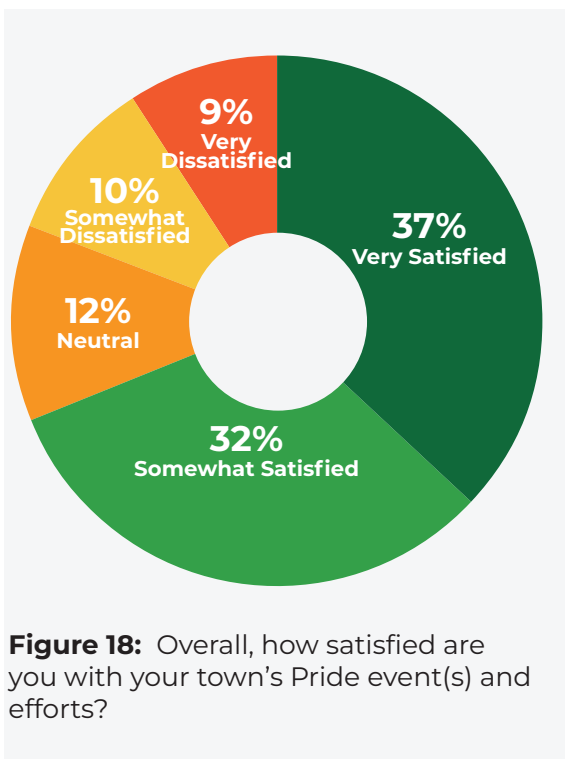
Figure 17: Why is Pride Important to You?

Have Pride organizations and events in rural communities improved the public perception of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in rural Ontario?

This research would point to, yes. According to 33% of respondents (n = 1,042), hate speech towards 2SLGBTQIA+ people has decreased. Whether this is true, or a perception, it is an important indicator that Pride organizations and events are conversation starters for many who may have had previous had thought it was okay to say homophobic, biphobic or transphobic comments.

60% of non-2SLGBTQIA+ respondents (n = 1,024) believe their town’s Pride has increased their understanding of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Increased understanding and knowledge of the 2SLGBTQIA+ can lead to empathy and sympathy of the challenges and barrier that the 2SLGBTQIA+ community goes through.





Improving Existing Rural Pride

Pride organizations spend countless hours of time and planning into their events and offerings. Although rural Pride organizations don't have the financial means of urban Pride events, rural Ontarians are by large pleased with their Pride events. 69% of rural Ontarians ($n = 2,180$) are satisfied with their town's Pride events and efforts.

Respondents were also asked what is something that city Prides offer that rural town Prides should and/or could offer. The following themes came out of their responses:

- A Pride parade or a Pride event
- Rural communities appear to offer one or the other
- A physical space dedicated for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals and programming
- Age-specific programming and supports such
- Family and children programming
- Supports for older and aging adults
- Larger entertainment such as drags
- Great awareness and visibility
- Pride flags, window displays in downtown
- Greater support from community leaders
- Politicians and other leaders walk in the parade

Section 7

Conclusion



Conclusion

2SLGBTQIA+ individuals living in rural communities and small towns face unique challenges and barriers that often exacerbate feelings of isolation and marginalization. Limited access to 2SLGBTQIA+ affirming resources, such as support groups, healthcare providers knowledgeable about gender and sexual diversity, and legal protections, can leave individuals vulnerable to discrimination and lack of essential services. Moreover, the tight-knit social fabric of rural areas, while fostering a sense of community for some, may also perpetuate conservative attitudes and stigma surrounding non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities.

This can lead to heightened fears of rejection and backlash, hindering individuals from openly expressing their true selves or seeking support from their immediate surroundings. Additionally, the absence of visible 2SLGBTQIA+ spaces and events further compounds feelings of invisibility and erasure, making it challenging for individuals to connect with peers and find solidarity within their local communities. These factors underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions and inclusive policies that address the unique needs of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals in rural areas, promoting acceptance, accessibility, and belonging for all.

Pride is one such targeted intervention that has a positive impact on rural Ontario communities. These impacts are multi-leveled, impacting the individual lives and experiences of those who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+ as well as those who are simply trying to expand their minds and make their communities more welcoming for all. Rural Pride organizations are well perceived in their communities but still have a long way to go to achieve even more of an impact on their communities.



Section 8

Recommendations and Advocacy



Recommendations

Funding for Pride Organizers

Supporting Pride events in rural towns through financial funding is crucial to ensure the visibility and representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in these often overlooked communities. By allocating resources to these events, we can empower local organizers to create inclusive spaces where LGBTQ+ individuals and allies can come together, celebrate their identities, and build supportive networks. Financial backing facilitates the organization of diverse programming, educational workshops, and community outreach efforts that promote understanding and acceptance within rural areas. Additionally, funding Pride events in rural towns helps alleviate the financial burden on organizers and ensures that these gatherings remain accessible to all members of the community, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Ultimately, investing in Pride events in rural towns is not just about hosting celebrations; it's about affirming the dignity and rights of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals in all corners of society.

Training and Resources for Pride Organizers

Training and resources for rural Pride organizers are crucial for fostering inclusive and effective community initiatives. Organizers in rural areas require specialized support due to unique challenges such as limited access to services and potential resistance to 2SLGBTQIA+ progress. Comprehensive training programs should encompass topics like community engagement strategies, conflict resolution, fundraising tactics, and legal rights awareness. Additionally, access to resources like networking opportunities, funding grants, and online toolkits can empower organizers to navigate logistical hurdles and amplify their impact. Tailoring these resources to rural contexts is key, acknowledging the specific needs and dynamics of smaller communities. By investing in targeted training and resources, rural Pride organizers can cultivate resilient and sustainable initiatives that promote diversity and acceptance in traditionally underserved areas.

Creation/Expansion of 2SLGBTQIA+ Services

The need to create and expand 2SLGBTQIA+ health and social services in rural communities and small towns is pressing and essential for promoting well-being and inclusivity. 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals in rural areas often face significant barriers to accessing affirming healthcare and support services due to geographic isolation, stigma, and a lack of specialized resources. By establishing and expanding dedicated services, such as culturally competent healthcare providers, mental health counselors, and support groups, these communities can address critical gaps in care. Providing tailored services that understand and affirm the unique needs of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals can enhance health outcomes, reduce disparities, and foster a sense of belonging and acceptance. Moreover, expanding these services not only benefits 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals directly but also contributes to building more equitable and resilient communities where everyone can thrive regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Future Research

Future research should be conducted to explore topics such as:

- The coming out journeys of individuals living in rural and urban communities.
- Economic Impact of Pride events on rural communities and small towns.

How Pride Organizers Can Use This Report

Advocacy Uses

Canada is seeing an increase in governmental legislations, policies and bylaws that limit or prevent the presence of Pride. This is particularly true at the municipal level in rural communities where so-called “neutral policy” policies are being applied for flying flags, painting crosswalks and other Pride visuals.

Pride organizers and other advocates can use the findings of this report to counter and fight back these regressive policies. Use the Quick Glance Findings on page 5 as a starting place.

Funding and Grant Uses

Use the findings of this report in your sponsorship asks and grant applications to prove why Pride is needed in your rural community. Sponsors are more likely to provide support when they know they’re providing an impact - especially for local equity-seeking communities - such as 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

Additionally ensure your sponsors ask positions rural Pride as an:

- Equity, inclusivity, diversity initiative
- Contributor to local economic development
- Tactic in local population retention and population growth

Section 9

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