

LFS 350 Community Project Proposal (Group 14)

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## Introduction

This community project aims to expand the promotional network of Health Initiative for Men's (HIM) Rainbow Soup Social to appeal to a more diverse group of men within the community of gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (GB&O MSM). This project is significant because it offers a safe social outlet for these men but lacks participant diversity. Recurring members seem to generally fall into the category of older, Caucasian men (Joshua Edward, *personal communication*). In light of this, our role is to address the lack of variety in both the participants and the soup recipes served as well as the promotional material scarcity, in order to encourage a more diverse attending population.

The main objectives of this project are:

- *To offer HIM insight on creating reusable digital promotional material templates that correspond with their pre-existing branding for their Rainbow Soup Social*
- *To revise HIM's current recipe book to reflect more nutritious and culturally diverse foods*
- *To implement theme nights and soup contests to attract more participants*
- *To expand HIM's promotional streams through several post-secondary campuses, neighbourhood houses, and various HIM events such as the condom packaging party and Whistler Pride and Ski Festival*

By completion of this project, we hope to answer the following inquiry questions:

- *How can we create nutritious, culturally diverse recipes that are suitable with the ingredients received by HIM from their community partners?*
- *How can we create promotional materials in order to appeal to a larger, more culturally diverse community?*

## **Background and Significance**

Mental health complications among gay men stem from a range of physical and mental challenges, including facing and fearing discrimination, as well as experiencing shame associated with internalized stigma. Studies have demonstrated that social support from friends, family, community and government support agencies significantly contribute to positive mental health. This leads to reduced vulnerability to mental illness and physical health problems, especially in gay communities (Lyons et al., 2013). A strong social network allows gay men to spend more time in an environment where they can comfortably express their sexuality without experiencing symptoms of stress and loneliness.

Currently, many community services targeted towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals focus on diseases and other illnesses (such as HIV/AIDS and substance abuse). A study examining survey responses of service providers in Toronto found that a focus on sexual health and HIV may prevent discussion of other social issues facing members of the LGBT community (Travers et al., 2010). This illness-based approach in addition to the exclusion of LGBT populations in public health policy and practice creates a service gap in which the social health needs of LGBT individuals are not addressed (Mulé et al., 2010).

The prevalence of food insecurity emerges amidst various areas within Vancouver, including that of the West End. Some of the barriers to community food security are the lack of affordability and accessibility to healthy, nutritious foods. HIM, as a Metro-Vancouver based gay men's health agency, seeks to bring more members of the gay community together through their weekly Rainbow Soup Social that runs on Thursday evenings. In collaboration with the Greater Vancouver Food Bank Society and the Gordon Neighbourhood House, HIM's soup

social strives to provide an opportunity for participants to interact with the agency's staff and fellow community members through the power of cooking and nutrition. In order to improve food security of the West End, the soup will be available through the local food hub for individuals who access the food bank (Gordon Neighbourhood House, 2016).

## **Methods**

Data pertaining to existing recipes, promotional materials (and associated avenues of promotion) as well as the West End Community Food Resource Guide will be provided by our community partner. As a way to familiarize ourselves with the ongoing situations GB&OMSM face in an urban setting, the group will continue to supplement our knowledge through an exploratory literary review. We will gather information on current community projects and their suitability in combating the service gap. In terms of data collection, we will be attending at least one of the February Rainbow Soup Socials to observe their operations and interview our key informants - Joshua Edward (Knowledge Translation Manager), HIM's coordinator, and the Social's Head Chef. In addition, with the help of our community partner, we aim to implement a demographic questionnaire to chart the ages of the participants and volunteers, their ethnicities, and frequency of attending the socials.

With the inquiry questions to focus our contributions, we hope to gain a better understanding HIM's priorities and areas of success and concern. After our series of interviews and compilation of questionnaire responses, we will summarize our findings graphically to represent the frequency of participation, diversity of ethnicities, and age range of participants and staff. This information will be used to create engaging and effective promotional materials that will attract a diverse composition of regular attendees for future events. Our recipes will aim to

reflect and appeal to their cultural diversity. At all times, we will keep in mind ethical considerations and the sensitivity of interviewing and surveying individuals which is kept entirely voluntary. Our interpretations of the questionnaire will be coded to allow for anonymity along with age ranges to respect those who prefer to not specify their age. We will fully respect the participants' decisions to not identify themselves and/or provide any additional information.

### **Success Factors**

Given the nature of our community project, the indication of “success” is unfortunately subjective. Through our contributions, we hope to provide an array of recipes to be adopted by HIM to fulfill their goal of diversifying their participant composition. Our next measure of success will be the compatibility and reusability of our promotional material based off whether the template can act as an extension to their pre-existing branding scheme. Communication will be conducted through weekly email check-ins and routine in-person meetings with our community partner to keep the project in line with the goals of the agency and group. Creating a lasting impression on our partner and their external audience can be fulfilled through displaying our approved promotional materials in all HIM satellite locations, as well as through the Pride Collective at UBC. Depending on the success of implementation, it may be feasible for HIM to reach out to other Lower Mainland post-secondary institutions to spread the word of their services. Another possibility would be to take our culturally-diverse recipes and improve them later on through the suggestions offered by their participants to instill a better sense of community.

## References

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