

Summary of Research Project

Blue Door opened the INNclusion program in 2021 to support 2SLGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness. The INNclusion program is York Region's first specialized 2SLGBTQ+ youth housing program. INNclusion provides up to 5 young people with support in achieving their goals and finding steady housing. This research project was led by Dr. Alex Abramovich (CAMH) and focused on evaluating the INNclusion program. Our research team interviewed (one-on-one and focus groups) INNclusion residents (youth) and staff about their experiences while they were at INNclusion and after they moved out. The main goal of the project was to understand the program strengths (areas that are working well) and areas that need improvement, and whether youth have found the program helpful in meeting their needs and goals.

Who participated?

A total of 17 people were enrolled in this project, including 7 youth living at INNclusion, 3 Blue Door/INNclusion staff, and 7 staff working at other youth organizations (360 Kids, Sutton Youth Shelter, Pride Home, Friends of Ruby, and Covenant House).

Findings

Pathways into INNclusion

Youth reported living in group homes, transitional housing programs, with their parents, family, friends, and in motels/hotels before moving into INNclusion.

Family Relationships

Most youth living at INNclusion had experienced rejection from and/or conflict with family members related to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. These conflicts changed their relationships with family. Many youth shared that their family members experienced mental health issues, as well as family histories of mental illness, trauma, and substance use, which impacted their relationships.

Goals While living at INNclusion

Youth shared many goals while living at INNclusion, including improving their mental health, accessing healthcare, continuing their education, finding stable housing after leaving INNclusion, getting their legal ID changed, finding employment, improving relationships with family and/or friends, and creating healthy daily habits and routines.

Youth Mental Health

All youth reported mental health concerns before, during, and after living at INNclusion. Some youth reported a long history of mental health concerns and complex mental health issues before moving into INNclusion. Youth believed that the cause of their mental health concerns was related to different things, such as fighting with family, not feeling supported by family, trauma, being in-between houses/shelters, not having enough money to support themselves, not having consistent access to food, dealing with stress, social isolation, and loneliness. Lastly, youth reported that suicide attempts were directly related to family conflict and unsafe housing situations.

Program Strengths and Main Housing Outcomes

Most of the youth living at INNclusion found the program and services to be helpful and appreciated living in a 2SLGBTQ+ inclusive and safe environment. Some examples of the strengths of the program include:

- Increased personal safety

- 2SLGBTQ+ inclusive and affirming environment
- Gender-affirming support
- Better mental health and wellbeing
- Harm reduction approach
- Independence within the program
- Privacy
- Support with employment
- Sense of belonging

Areas for Improvement

INNclusion is a new program and there are still some areas for the program to improve. Below are some of the areas for improvement that were reported by the youth:

- Staff availability/coverage
- Clear guidelines for program expectations and help meeting those expectations
- Conflict resolution between housemates
- Support with reaching goals
- Support moving into INNclusion
- More support with finding housing
- Food availability
- Learning life skills
- Mental health support
- Affirming healthcare
- Connections with community and social groups

Conclusions and Recommendations

Youth were thankful for the opportunity to live in a 2SLGBTQ+ specific housing program. This evaluation showed many strengths and positive aspects of the INNclusion program, as well as areas to grow and improve.

Key Program Recommendations

- Hire more staff
- Set clear and consistent program expectations
- Improve move-in process
- Provide regular support for reaching goals
- Provide and/or help youth access more mental health supports
- Support youth in accessing affirming healthcare
- Encourage and help create community and social connections
- Offer more life skills programming to youth
- Provide support with finding housing
- Improve move-out process and support after leaving INNclusion