Out On The Shelf Evaluation Report

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

This project was prepared for, and in partnership with, Out On The Shelf (OOTS), a queer library and resource centre in Guelph, Ontario. As a volunteer-driven, registered non-profit organization, OOTS was keen to assess its programming and processes to inform improvements and to secure future funding. Evaluation activities were carried out from October 2019 to February 2020 and were comprised of a program participant survey, board member and volunteer focus groups, a graffiti wall, and attendance tracking. In addition to providing a background on the OOTS organization, this report will outline the intended research goals for the evaluation, describe the evaluation methods used in further detail, present the key findings, and discuss the implications of these results as they relate to OOTS.

Background

The inception of OOTS dates back to 1997 when the initial idea of a queer community centre emerged (Out On The Shelf [OOTS], n.d.a). Years of planning followed and OOTS began to take shape. Housed in a boardroom of Guelph's Wyndham Street CMHA, OOTS officially began operation in 2005 (OOTS, n.d.a). It has changed locations in Guelph's downtown core over the years moving to the Matrix Building in 2007 and later to the 10C Shared Space where it is currently situated (OOTS, n.d.a). In 2008, OOTS became a non-profit organization with an Operations Committee and a Board of Directors (OOTS, n.d.a). This structure has shifted over time. Today OOTS consists of a working board comprised of eight members with two vacant positions, five committees (Guelph Pride, Library, Programming, Fundraising, Marketing), 61 volunteers (including board members), and 142 active members (C. Harding, personal communication, February 14, 2020).

It is OOTS's mission "to foster connections and leadership that provide a focus and visibility for the LGBTQ community through partnerships, service, and education" (OOTS, n.d.a). It seeks to do this by offering programming and events which aim to build connections, bridge gaps, and create safer spaces for all members of the LGBTQ community and their allies (OOTS, n.d.b). In order to support its mission and continue to meet the needs of the community OOTS serves, the outgoing OOTS Chair and OOTS Fundraising Chair approached the Research Shop to undertake an evaluation. This evaluation would consider both the current OOTS board and volunteer processes as well as current OOTS programming.

Research Goals

This collaborative evaluation project intends to support OOTS in the enhancement of both its programming and board/volunteer processes as well as provide data to help strengthen and justify future requests for and attainment of funding.

Therefore, the goals for this evaluation project were to evaluate:

1. Current OOTS programming including:

- Program attendance
- Program accessibility and impact
- Current user demographics (i.e., program reach), experiences, and satisfaction

2. Current OOTS board and volunteer process including:

- Accessibility of getting and remaining involved
- Structure and functioning
- Training needs and skill development
- Role and task clarity
- Burn-out

Methods

In order to achieve the outlined goals, a number of research strategies were employed. A survey was created to better understand OOTS program participants and their perceptions and usage of programming. This survey was offered in hard copy paper format as well as electronically through the online Qualtrics survey platform. A whiteboard "graffiti wall" was also affixed in the OOTS space in 10C to provide a place for program users to record testimonials. Further, program facilitators tracked attendance at each meeting during the evaluation period. Finally, two separate focus groups were facilitated—one with OOTS board members and another with OOTS volunteers—to explore the current experience of being involved with OOTS.

Out On The Shelf Program Participant Attendance Tracking

Measure
OOTS program facilitators tracked attendance at their individual programming using a shared Google document. This tracking form allows facilitators to monitor usage over time.

Recruitment
The OOTS Chair sent periodic reminders over the evaluation period prompting program facilitators to complete the attendance tracking Google document.

Procedure
OOTS program facilitators have historically documented attendance at each programming session. Thus, attendance records were available to the research team from January 2018-April 2018. The attendance tracking was reinstated in September 2019. Where the data was available, descriptive statistics were used to describe the program attendance from January 2018 until the end of January 2020.

Out On The Shelf Program Participant Survey and eSurvey

Measure
Survey questions were drafted and revised in collaboration with the OOTS Board. The questions were designed to learn more about the participants being reached by OOTS programming as well as the experiences and insights of those program participants. The survey was inputted into Qualtrics, an online survey platform, and hard copies were also printed.

Recruitment
In order to recruit program participant respondents, the link to the online survey was disseminated through OOTS social media channels and email reminders were sent by the OOTS Chair. There were two calls for survey recruitment over social media—one when the survey was launched in November 2019 and another before the survey closed in January 2020.

Through coordination with the OOTS Chair and program facilitators, hard copy paper surveys were also distributed and collected by the research team at two of OOTS's evening programs. This gave participants of these programs the option to complete the survey in person.

Procedure
Before completing the online survey and the paper survey, participants had the opportunity to review a form outlining study information and consent. Participants were notified that their individual responses would not be linked to their identity.

The surveys were comprised of 19 questions which collected both demographic information and allowed respondents to share their OOTS program experiences/input. It was estimated that the survey would take about 15 minutes to complete. The paper survey asked respondents to answer program-specific questions about the OOTS program where they were completing the hard-copy survey while the online survey asked respondents to answer program-specific questions about the OOTS program that they most frequently attended. For all other questions, the surveys were identical.

The online survey was active for approximately ten weeks launching on November 4, 2019 and closing on January 12, 2020. Hard copy paper surveys were also distributed and collected by the research team at two OOTS programs—one in November 2019 and one in December 2019.

By the end of the 10-week period, a total of 20 individuals had completed the online survey and 9 had completed the survey in its hard copy paper format. The responses of both versions were collated and both descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to describe the survey data collected.

Out On The Shelf Graffiti Wall

Measure
A 32" x 48" whiteboard was affixed at the OOTS entrance where current OOTS users could spontaneously write or draw testimonials. The board contained instructions and prompts which

allowed users to share their OOTS experiences in whatever way they liked (writing, drawing, etc.).

Recruitment

OOTS users were not actively recruited to contribute to the Graffiti Wall. However, due to its location at the entrance of OOTS, it was anticipated that this would encourage engagement.

Procedure

The whiteboard used for the Graffiti Wall was affixed outside the entrance to OOTS by 10C staff in conjunction with the OOTS Chair. The research team set up the whiteboard with instructions asking OOTS users to share their experiences. The board was divided in two with one half containing a prompt for users to share what OOTS means to them and the other half prompting users to share what they bring to OOTS and their community. A disclaimer was written at the bottom of the board to make users aware that any content provided may be used for research purposes, in funding applications, or on public-facing documents. The board was monitored periodically when the research team. Although the board was to be erased periodically if it got full, the research team erased it only once toward the end of the data collection period. It was photographed for documentation purposes at the beginning of December 2019, at the end of January 2020, and once again at the end of the collection period in mid-February 2020.

The graffiti wall with instructions and prompts remained accessible to OOTS users from the beginning of November 2019 until mid-February 2020. The content captured in the photographs of the Graffiti Wall were assessed and summarized. These user experiences were combined with other findings in the final key recommendations.

Out On The Shelf Board Member and Volunteer Focus Groups

Measure

Focus groups were conducted to assess the current structure and/or functioning of the OOTS Board/organization. Two separate focus groups were held—one with current OOTS Board members and another with current OOTS volunteers.

Both focus groups were guided by a 'rose, bud, and thorn' activity. In each instance, a large paper with an image of a rose was displayed. Colour-coded post-it notes were handed to all participants. Each colour represented either a rose, a bud, or a thorn. Participants were asked to write positive activities to continue on "rose" post-it notes, positive new ideas that have the potential to start on "bud" post-it notes, and challenges and negative activities to stop on "thorn" post-it notes. Participants were also prompted with "things to think about" displayed with the rose image. These included: The accessibility of getting and staying involved with OOTS; the current structure or functioning of OOTS; board/organization (e.g., time commitment); training needs and skills building; role or task clarity; burn-out; how OOTS has/can help you be successful in your term. Post-it notes were placed on the corresponding part of the rose image and the research team facilitator used each note to further discussion among the group.

Recruitment

Recruitment for both focus groups was done by the OOTS Chair. The Board member focus group took place at the beginning of the regular monthly Board meeting for convenience. The OOTS Chair sent out a Doodle Poll via email to determine a meeting date that would accommodate the availability of most members. Similarly, the OOTS Chair sent out an additional Doodle Poll to determine the availability of OOTS volunteers to attend an evening focus group. The research team was also consulted about these dates to ensure staffing capacity for focus group facilitation. Snacks were available at both focus groups.

Procedure

Before beginning the focus group, the research team verbally outlined study information and consent to participate in the focus group. Participants were given a form which they were also able to read and keep. Participants were notified that their individual responses would not be linked to their identity in any research products, however, they were reminded that due to the public nature of focus group discussion, their responses within that context could not remain anonymous. A box was provided at both focus groups to allow participants to write down and submit thoughts they did not want to share publicly within the group.

The Board member focus group took place in late November 2019 and the volunteer focus group took place in early January 2020. Both focus groups were conducted at 10C Shared Space in downtown Guelph, where OOTS is located, and lasted approximately an hour and a half. A total of seven Board members participated in the Board member focus group and a total of six volunteers participated in the volunteer focus group.

During each focus group, members of the research team took comprehensive electronic notes to record the discussion among participants. Notes from each focus group were analyzed thematically and compared.

Findings

Out On The Shelf Program Participant Attendance Tracking

OOTS tracked attendance of their five programs (Women's Social Network, Rainbow Knitters, Run/Walk Group, Euchre and Gaymes, Men's Social Network) from November 2018 until January 2020, except between April 2019 and September 2019. From November 2018 until January 2020, 309 people attended various programs offered by OOTS. However, it is worth noting that this number likely includes the same people on multiple occasions, as the same people tend to attend the same programs. Out of the five OOTS programs offered during the attendance-tracking period, the Women's Social Network was the most frequented, with 102 attendees in total over the November 2018 to January 2020 period. The Women's Social Network is followed by the Rainbow Knitters (72 attendees); Euchre and Gaymes (58 attendees); Men's Social Network (49 attendees); and Run/Walk Group (28 attendees).

These numbers have some limitations, however, because there are some irregularities in attendance tracking. For instance, the Women's Social Network was cancelled twice throughout

the attendance tracking period (in January 2019 and January 2020). Further, the Run/Walk Club only started in May 2019 and was temporarily discontinued over the winter months. Finally, the Men's Social Network did not always record attendance (in January 2019, February 2019, and April 2019). Further, they voted to leave OOTS in September 2019. Thus, there is no attendance data for the Men's Social Network from September 2019 until the end of the attendance tracking period. Moving forward, attendance tracking should thus be interpreted with these irregularities in mind.

Out On The Shelf Program Participant Survey and eSurvey

Demographic Information

A total of 29 surveys were completed by participants of various OOTS programs. Most respondents were within the 25-34 age range, with only a few being over the age of 44 (See Figure 1). Respondents were able to select multiple identifiers to describe their gender identity and sexual orientation (see Figure 2 and 3). Only 4 respondents identified as a visible minority and only 5 identified as an Indigenous person.

Almost three quarters of respondents indicated that they had a condition that limited their activity and/or participation in activities. For 17 of these respondents a mental health condition was at least one of the conditions identified.

Figure 1. Age Range of OOTS Program Participants

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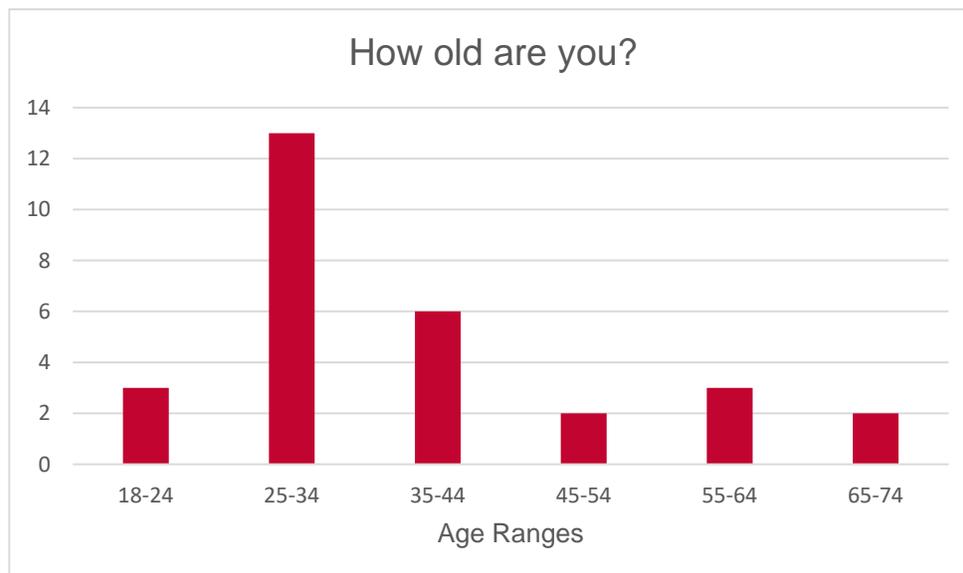
Figure 2. Gender Identity of OOTS Program Participants
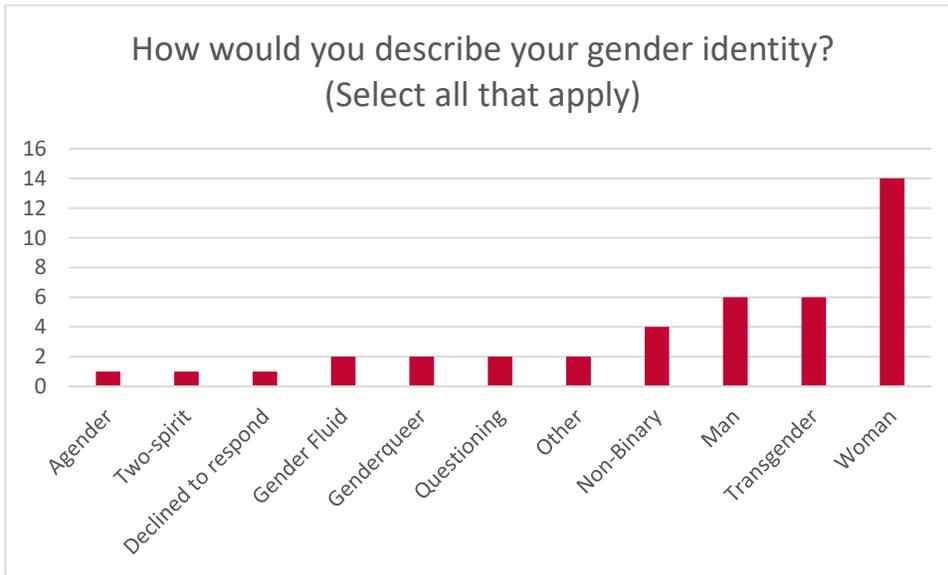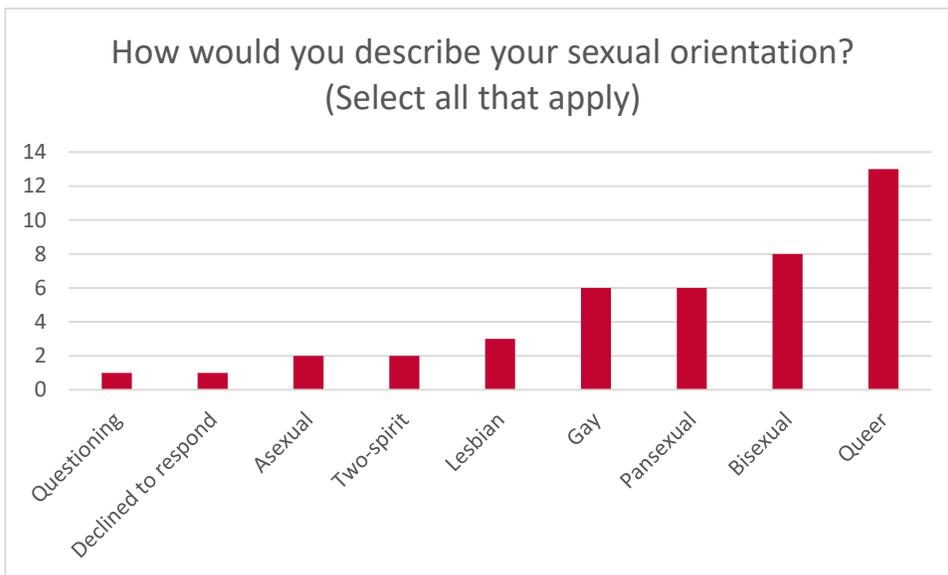
How would you describe your gender identity?
(Select all that apply)

Figure 3. Sexual Orientation of OOTS Program Participants

How would you describe your sexual orientation?
(Select all that apply)

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Thematic Analysis

The analysis of surveys found various common responses to open-ended questions about OOTS programing and governance. The top six points of interest are identified and expanded upon here.

Programs appeal to a variety of interests:

Respondents were very happy that OOTS offered programming centered around other hobbies and interests such as running and knitting, rather than being centered around the commonality of being part of the queer community. Respondents felt that having other activities to partake in was both a good way to express other parts of their personality as well as take their mind off of other stresses in life. One respondent highlighted the following in their survey response:

> *"Being new to Guelph I was so happy that there were queer groups centered around activities, like crafts or games. This lets me find people who had similar interests, as well as people from the queer and trans community."*

Programs support a welcoming environment and community:

In general, OOTS establishes a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. Many participants expressed positive statements about the welcoming environment facilitated by program leads and other participants contributing to such an environment by being welcoming and respectful. Participants also highlighted that new members are readily welcomed into the group and making the transition into a new program is effortless as a result. Many participants highlighted that the OOTS programs have been positive opportunities for them to develop new friendships.

Issues around timing of programs:

Some respondents identified that the timing of some of their preferred programs made it difficult for them to attend regularly. For instance, there were concerns mentioned about programs held during the day on weekdays, as work schedules made it impossible to attend. Others noted that some OOTS programming overlapped with other community programming, forcing participants to choose which program they would rather attend. The most commonly cited concern about program timing was regarding the frequency of programs. Some participants indicated that they would like OOTS programs to run more regularly. One participant highlighted:

> *"If [the program] was more frequent, people on rotating shifts could go. More frequency would create a better chance of friendships."*

Communication concerns with OOTS Board and program facilitators:

Communication seemed to be an ongoing concern cited by several respondents. It is clear that there has been both miscommunication and a lack of communication occurring between the board and the program participants which has led to negative experiences on behalf of some participants. Many participants cited that their concerns were either not making it up to the board level or not being addressed when they did make it to the board.

Concerns about ageism and exclusionary behaviour:

There were some concerns related to exclusionary behavior towards one group of OOTS program participants. This group felt as though the board did not understand their needs and made no effort to do so, which resulted in negative experiences for some group members. These members cited feeling unwelcome by the OOTS board as a result of their age. They felt that their concerns went unaddressed and that no attempts were made to make them feel more welcomed into the group.

This quote highlights that it is not only OOTS specifically, but queer events in the community more broadly that are contributing to the marginalization of those with disabilities.

When responding to the survey, this respondent also highlighted concerns with the way in which this question was phrased, noting the following:

"…mobility difficulties are not the problem, the lack of accessibility in the space is the problem. The options listed here are problematic because they list health conditions as barriers, when they are simply part of disabled people identities…disabilities are not barriers, inaccessibility is."

Out On The Shelf Graffiti Wall

Although there were not many contributions to the whiteboard graffiti wall over the data collection period, the comments and drawings that were left communicated important messages about the meaning of OOTS to its users and what users bring to OOTS.

Safe and Welcoming Space

The comments on the graffiti wall reflect OOTS as being a community and a place where queer people can feel safe to gather. There is a recognition that people are welcomed to come as they are in the OOTS space. Further, there were drawings of hearts on the board which perhaps suggest that OOTS is a loving environment or one in which users feel loved.

One person wrote, "I keep meaning to come but I'm a bit nervous because I don't know anyone in the community yet"

Another responded directly to this comment saying, "Whenever you're ready you will be welcomed".

Building Connections

Not only was OOTS recognized as a gathering place, but one user commented that they direct those who are feeling isolated from other queer people to OOTS. Additionally, they noted making personal introductions to support these connections.

OOTS Library

The sunshine in the OOTS space and wealth of amazing books for reading were seen as meaningful features of OOTS. However, one comment noted that there were no volunteers on duty to talk to both times that they visited.

Out On The Shelf Board Member and Volunteer Focus Groups

Thematic Analysis

The analysis of the two focus groups shed light on various aspects with regards to the current structure and/or functioning of the OOTS Board/organization. The top nine aspects that were brought up consistently during the focus groups are identified and expanded upon here.

Financial Considerations:
Money and financial considerations seem to be at the core of and affect many decisions that the OOTS Board makes. For instance, the Board identified that fundraising activities have been rather difficult because they are so reliant on money. Further, it is apparent that being mindful of the budget has an impact on their various events and social gatherings. For example, Board members have expressed interest in organizing events to meet with fellow members outside the OOTS space, "but without having to spend a lot of money"; they would prefer low-cost team-building events as well as inexpensive hang-outs.

Finances also determine the success of an event; OOTS organized a queer movie night which cost only 99 cents to borrow the movie online. Since the movie night had a great turnout and was affordable, it was thought of as a very successful event. In general, the Board is open to new ideas (e.g., for events) although there is sometimes pushback which usually stems from financial considerations. Finally, the Board recognizes that there is not much they can do about their financial situation and at the same time identifies that financial stability is an issue for the functioning of OOTS. Currently, finances inhibit them from hosting events for the public or investing in marketing, which is restricting.

Inclusivity/Welcoming Atmosphere:
In general, OOTS establishes a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere, be it for new members, volunteer "veterans" or the Board members themselves. In order to foster this atmosphere of inclusivity, the Board has recently implemented an anti-oppression training that is mandatory for all new volunteers. This training has been successful in encouraging people to be mindful of each other's needs and in allowing everyone to express themselves.

Just recently, there has been an increase in Board inclusivity and diversity. In general, the Board is very open to new ideas and provides a lot of support for implementing new initiatives. Additionally, the Board is very accommodating for people's lives, and members and volunteers always try to look out for one another. Similarly, OOTS Board members and volunteers have been described as understanding of limitations to one's mental as well as physical health. There is a lot of flexibility and people try to fill in the gaps where they can. Further, the Board displays great passion towards OOTS and the queer community.

10C – the space where OOTS events take place – has been described as a comfortable and cozy setting that "makes people more trustworthy because they feel more comfortable in this space". The atmosphere at OOTS has further been depicted as a welcoming environment and a great place to hang out and get other work done while also learning about queer literature.

Need for Better Communication:
The Board members as well as volunteers have expressed that there are some issues with communication within OOTS. More specifically, there have been issues with communication related to prospective volunteers. Some did not know what possible volunteering opportunities existed and, therefore, initially missed out on volunteering with OOTS. Further, within OOTS there has been miscommunication regarding what Board member roles entail. These roles have been misrepresented as rather chaotic, which has discouraged some volunteers from becoming Board members.

In order to address communication issues and better distribute information, OOTS has been using Slack, an online messaging platform. Although Slack has improved communication within

OOTS, OOTS Board members as well as volunteers expressed that they would like to add more groups to Slack. It was suggested that there could be a group for program facilitators as well as a group that includes everyone at OOTS, rather than separate groups.

Another initiative to improve communication was the creation of committee reports that are stored in the drive and shared centrally. These reports are meant to keep all Board members up to date on everyone's work and activities.

Positive Impact:
Working for OOTS is a rewarding activity in that OOTS has a positive impact on the community. OOTS is one of the few queer organizations in this area and people who hear of events organized by OOTS generally react with admiration and gratitude. As one of the Board members identified, "people are almost desperate for such events". Further, OOTS is one of the few queer organizations that offers sober queer events, which establishes an even more inclusive atmosphere. Finally, OOTS connects the queer community not just by hosting queer events but by centering events around activities, such as knitting or running groups. This is greatly appreciated by the Guelph queer community because it makes people feel recognized as individuals. Also, since the space at 10C is a shared space utilized by a number of community members, it allows OOTS to easily connect with other community groups.

Role and Task Clarity:
In general, it has been difficult to define what one's roles and tasks are, be it as Board members or as volunteers. For library volunteers, the tasks feel unclear. They expressed the need for a task list of things that need to be done daily/weekly/monthly. They recognize that there are not always enough tasks for volunteers to complete. They would like to take on more tasks or projects during their shifts, especially knowing that the Board members usually take on too many tasks.

Further, the library volunteer instructions may not be clear to everyone and may be in need of reorganizing. The current instructions may inhibit new volunteers from easily comprehending their expected roles and tasks and would benefit from rephrasing and updated visuals. If everyone has a designated role and is clear on their specific tasks, it is easier to identify any gaps. This would also help in recruiting new members for specific positions, and greater role and task clarity would support the Library Chair in delegating tasks among library volunteers. Additionally, it would make it easier to identify and speak directly with specific volunteers when something does not go as planned.

Regarding the OOTS Board, lack of role clarity has led to high turnover in the past. It was not clear to members what their tasks were and, consequently, some left their positions. A proposed idea was to have a document that outlines all the different Board roles and corresponding responsibilities. However, this idea has not been able to be implemented due to time restrictions experienced by Board members. The lawyer jargon in which existing policies and procedures are written has proven to be a challenge. This language has made them difficult to understand. Thus, these policies and procedures are neither used nor followed uniformly. Finally, the Board also recognizes the lack of clarity with volunteer roles due to the recent abrupt turnover of the Library Chair role.

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Burn-out/Taking on Too Many Tasks:
Board members may take on too many tasks leaving them with too little time to devote to semi-essential tasks. For instance, it would be beneficial for the Board members to establish a document that outlines the different Board roles, however lack of time was noted as a barrier to creating such a document. Further, certain Chair positions on the OOTS Board are currently empty. The tasks that would usually be completed within the portfolios of those positions must then be added to the responsibilities of other Board members thereby further increasing member workloads. The Board taking on too many tasks also affects the volunteers. For example, the Library Chair cannot keep up with tasks such as scheduling meetings. In addition, the volunteers expressed having time during their shifts to take on extra tasks which the Board members could delegate to them.

Volunteers Getting/Remaining Involved:
Due to a lack of a Volunteer Chair over the six months prior to the focus group, engaging and retaining new volunteers has been difficult for OOTS. Although OOTS has obtained new volunteers, it has been challenging to organize them and assign appropriate tasks. The Board recognizes that they are in need of a better onboarding system.

In general, there seems to be a lot of initial interest from volunteers to work in the library. However, it is noticeable that that interest fades over time, which results in high turnover of library volunteers. This is especially problematic as it requires a lot of volunteers to keep the library open and accessible. Providing training for new library volunteers may be a possible solution to address this issue, as the completion of training can create a sense of belonging. Further, it might help to pair up volunteers to ensure that two volunteers always work at the same time. This strategy could support an environment in which volunteers feel more connected and therefore remain involved. Pairing may also alleviate feelings of loneliness in the morning which has been identified by volunteers.

From the volunteers' perspective, they feel encouraged to get involved, there are many different ways to do so, and it is easy with shifts that are flexible. Further, OOTS offers a variety of programs, as opposed to just occasional once-a-month gatherings, which also help to facilitate volunteer involvement. However, volunteers recognize that a lack of task clarity makes it difficult to remain engaged as they often get confused, which may cause them to leave.

Volunteer Desire to be More Involved:
Volunteers recognize that Board members take on too many tasks and would like to help by sharing those tasks. Library volunteers, in particular, identified that they have some extra time during their shifts, but are unsure how to fill it. They expressed a need for greater communication around task delegation. Volunteers also felt that more frequent meetings should be established, such as monthly evening meetings. They articulated the wish for a greater feeling of cohesion and belonging. Finally, volunteers suggested that OOTS could be more present on social media and proposed that they could do "takeovers" featuring the volunteers at OOTS.

Training Needs and Skill Development:
In general, volunteers find the training to become a library volunteer good and straightforward. However, for some aspects it is too simplistic and does not include descriptions of all the tasks volunteers could complete during their shifts. It would be helpful to have written training materials available at all times in order to share knowledge across volunteers. Further, the training could be more hands-on. In addition to this type of basic library training, there is a need for mental health and first aid training. OOTS represents a safe space and inclusive atmosphere and

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learning how to respond to individuals in crisis would be helpful. Similar to volunteers, Board members also expressed a desire for more learning and training opportunities.

Implications

Key Considerations

Welcoming and Inclusive Atmosphere
Board members as well as volunteers expressed multiple times, they greatly appreciate the welcoming and inclusive space OOTS creates. Further, OOTS creates an atmosphere where it is easy to build relationships with one another and to form friendships. This is evident from the participant surveys, the graffiti wall, as well as the focus groups.

Future considerations:

- Continue to cultivate this environment, as this is something OOTS members greatly value.
- Take concerns regarding inclusivity of older members into consideration in order to further foster OOTS' welcoming atmosphere.

Role and Task Clarity
Both focus groups identified difficulties defining one's position in terms of roles and tasks it entails. Task clarity was identified as a contributing factor to work overload and high turnover among Board members as well as disengagement among volunteers.

Future considerations:

- Create a document that clearly describes and defines each Board member's role and the tasks that accompany it.
- Restructure and update library volunteer instructions so that they are clear and outline what volunteer tasks entail, especially for new volunteers.
- Delegate more Board member tasks to library volunteers who feel like they do not have enough tasks. Such delegation would also help to reduce the high task-load that the Board members are currently experiencing.

Transition Periods
As the Board members identified, there is no transition period for when a Board member leaves, and a new Board member fills that position. This is problematic because the new Board member then does not know what the previous Board member had been doing.

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Future considerations:

- Implement shadow periods during which new and old Board members overlap to allow for orientation to a position and to support this knowledge transition.
- Assign each Board member as a back-up for one other Board member as a mechanism for providing coverage if, for instance, another member falls sick or leaves abruptly requiring coverage for a longer period of time.

Volunteer Engagement

Volunteers have expressed multiple ways in which they would like to be more engaged in OOTS' functioning and activities.

Future considerations:

- Prioritize coverage of the Volunteer Chair position in order to ensure ongoing attraction and retention of volunteers.
- Organize more frequent volunteer events to foster a feeling of cohesion.
- Pair up volunteers during their shifts to further support volunteer connections and belonging.
- Provide written training materials to help build capacity among volunteers.
- Create opportunities for volunteers to be more involved (e.g., supporting OOTS's social media presence or helping with Board members' tasks) to help cultivate a sense of purpose and thereby engagement. This may help to prevent high volunteer turnover in the future.

Training and Development

While OOTS Board members and volunteers are generally satisfied with the training provided for them, they wish for mental health and first aid training. The importance of such mental health training was reaffirmed through the participant surveys in which multiple respondents identified that mental health conditions often kept them from attending OOTS programming.

Future considerations:

- Provide OOTS Board members and volunteers with first aid and mental health training in order to create a safer environment, which may also support participants in attending OOTS programs.

Financial Barriers

In order to help with financial issues that OOTS is experiencing, events that can bring the queer community together without costing a lot of money are important.

Future considerations:

- Organize low- and no-cost events (e.g., the previous queer movie night cost less than one dollar for the movie rental).
- Create a Community Liaison Chair that could build lasting connections within the community for the purposes of collaboration, cost-sharing, and funding opportunities.

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Communication

It was indicated that a lack of communication existed between the Board and volunteers and between the Board and program participants.

Future considerations:

- Create and distribute documents that list each Board member's role and responsibilities to help volunteers identify and contact the appropriate Board member when needed. This might also improve the transparency of decision making and create a more inclusive dialogue.

Timing of programs

As is evident from the participant survey, the timing of the different OOTS programs is problematic for some participants.

Future considerations:

- Consult participants about the timing of programs in order to better suit their needs and to ensure the time of program leads and volunteers is being maximized.

Accessibility

As mentioned in the survey, there are concerns regarding the accessibility of OOTS programs to those with disabilities.

Future considerations:

- Consider accessibility for all unique abilities when thinking about the OOTS space and planning events and programs. Taking such disabilities into account will also help maintain the inclusive and welcoming atmosphere for which OOTS is known.

OOTS Library

From responses on the graffiti wall it is evident that the OOTS library space is perceived very positively and the wall and survey provided suggestions to enhance this resource.

Future considerations:

- Add audio books and/or streaming services to the library.
- Ensure regular library volunteer staffing to support engagement with library visitors.

Conclusion

In order to continue to support its mission and the community it serves, it is important that OOTS prioritizes the improvement of volunteer processes and engagement as well as Board member task management and succession planning. Further, consideration should be given to cost, accessibility, and timing of programs and events in order to ensure feasibility and reach to all potential program participants. Overall, OOTS is much more than a queer library and resource

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centre in Guelph. OOTS is recognized as an inclusive space where folks feel welcome and comfortable expressing themselves and their ideas.

OOTS Board Member Reflections

Volunteer Recruitment, Retention and Engagement

Many of the issues highlighted in the report can be addressed by getting comprehensible, structured policies and procedures in place as well as developing a training program so that volunteers gain the skills and capacities, they need to address community needs. Given the levels of burnout on the Board, I think the best way to accomplish this is to apply for larger grants aimed at LGBTQ non-profits and use it to hire a part time director for OOTS that has the kind of expertise needed to oversee the development of these procedures/programs while ensuring further necessary funds are acquired to keep it going.

OOTS cannot simply focus on just looking for new chairs—we have to attain these folks and allow time for learning. The pressure on board members to take on more responsibility in the absence of a chair, is not resolved the day that someone new is voted onto the board. There isn't necessarily something that we can work on, per se, but just something I've noticed as I've gotten started. I've been thinking more about the suggestion that we spin volunteer positions to read more skill-based—that is, what we can provide at the forefront along with what the responsibilities are. Realistically, the library world is quite competitive right now, and I think board positions framed via the skills a volunteer would gain are attractive to folks who are potentially interested in library board work.

After reading through the evaluation report, it is clear that the community is obviously interested in volunteering with OOTS but the retention rate and clarity of the roles affects how long they stay. I think the next board should really focus on amalgamating the Guelph Pride and OOTS volunteer applications so people can streamline the things they're most interested in. If at all possible, a link to each position should be attached to the document so people can see, overall, what the role they're interested in looks like. Then, after applying, a more detailed plan can be sent to them so they can gauge and choose the roles they'd like to step into.

I love the idea of volunteer takeovers on social media! I think right now our social media is very graphic-centred. People are most responsive to seeing the faces of real people doing jobs and being happy. Giving volunteers prompts for what we expect from their takeover lets them know, ahead of the fact, if they're interested in participating and the types of things we'd most like to see. I think it's important that our volunteers have a guideline set out for them, so they don't feel as though we're giving them a responsibility and hoping they know what to do with it. I think it would benefit their sense of belonging with OOTS.

The report points to the importance of communication, not only as a tool for transparency around governance, but also as a way for connecting members and volunteers. The Volunteer Chair, in particular, should make increasing communication a priority. Committee Chairs are already engaging their committee volunteers. The Volunteer Chair needs to communicate and collaborate with the other Chairs more closely to gain an understanding of current training and

communications and develop further opportunities for volunteer engagement and connection. In short, volunteer retention should be a priority as much as volunteer recruitment. A more programmatic approach to OOTS volunteering might be beneficial, which will help with role and task clarity for both board members and volunteers.

Clearly the implementation of Slack has been a big tool for further project management, and people have responded positively to that. To me this says that people want structure as it is much easier to accomplish tasks when there are clear lines of organization and you know who to contact to get tasks accomplished. I think moving forward it would be beneficial to have more project management tools as well as some documents clearly outlining who has which roles and what the best ways to contact them are.

Addressing Accessibility and Programming Needs

Building diversity, inclusivity and better accessibility are slow but steady processes but I've seen OOTS brainstorming & working towards making this possible. Resources, as always, are unfortunately what keeps things from progressing faster. The present volunteer group are dedicated, but a high turnover rate, student schedules, and not enough volunteers to keep the library constantly staffed have been consistent problems for the space. In my own experience, chronic health problems, unstable work, and mental health occasionally take over and being present and available on the board was not always an option, and I know that many others suffer from these and other circumstances. A larger, dedicated volunteer group and more funds coming in consistently would allow for some incredible things to be done.

I'm interested in how to offer low/no-cost events, which is mentioned as something the board is very willing and receptive to, while at the same time balancing the board's lack of time for brainstorming and planning these events. These two ideas are compounded by this message that new programming is in demand from our members, while at the same time we're hearing from library volunteers that they want more tasks to do on shift. In this case, I could see some kind of outlet for library volunteers to pitch no-cost events as a nice way to come up with no-cost event ideas. I'm sure there are other places like this, where tasks usually allotted to the board could shift to the library volunteers.

The only thing I'm apprehensive about is the potential of a Community Liaison Chair. I worry that whoever steps into the role may step back part-way into the year and take those resources and connections with them. I think if we have some kind of incentive for people to take on this role (such as funding or a guarantee of some kind), then we'd be able to see people who are most serious about building a relationship with the community step into the role. I'd also like to see that person be consistent for a two-year responsibility period so that people are comfortable talking to them and don't think the relationship they build with that person dissipates every May. If we're to have someone step into that role, then having them build a connection with local high school gay-straight alliances and senior centres would allow for us to have a voice from multiple age-groups in the city.

References

Out On The Shelf. (n.d.). *Our history.* http://www.outontheshelf.com/Our-History

Out On The Shelf. (n.d.). *Programming at Out On The Shelf.* http://www.outontheshelf.com/Our-History

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