

Report



exChange

September 2023- November 2023



Report prepared by Melissa-Ann Ledo, exChange Project Manager

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Project Summary

exChange is a response to the want and need to bridge the gap of various generations of 2SLGBTQI+ individuals and communities, honouring the stories of young queer folk and the older generation who paved the way. The goal is to begin building relationships within the english-speaking 2SLGBTQI+ communities in Montreal/Tiohtià:ke through artmaking and storytelling at trans inclusive and celebratory events. The end goal is to share the work with the city at large, and create on-going connections between generations, especially since these links are not always present in the biological family structures of queer folks.

Our first event took place on Saturday, November 18th, 2023 and was the beginning of the exchanges to bridge the gap of our 2SLGBTQI+ histories of resilience and queer joy. With over 35 individuals participating in the event, it was a successful day of deep exchange, art making, and the gathering of ideas of what the community wants to see happen next! Participants and the team equally expressed their gratitude for the event, and their eagerness for the next phase of this initiative.

Methodology

The approach for this project is Social-Innovation adventure! Inspired by the 2012 Centre for Social Innovation values-based and inclusive definition: Social innovation refers to the creation, development, adoption and integration of new and renewed concepts, systems, and practices that put people and planet first. The approach aims to be inclusive, holistic and prioritises the needs of people. It uses both new and remixed ideas as part of the solution, providing us with “ways to draw on our history and to bring this depth of knowledge into our future in new ways”. The definition emphasises that people develop social innovations through stages (often nonlinear): Ideation, Invention, Adoption, Impact. It aims to create a low-barrier of access to participate intended to foster more inclusive approaches. It argues for prototyping, testing, and cycles of feedback.

Social benefit goals

- Breaking isolation
- Participatory designed outcomes
- Knowledge exchange
- Creative outlets



Deliverables

- New partnership development
- Social innovation project that is co-branded with partners
- Final report with recommendations for future projects

Completed Steps of Project - Phase 1

- **Ideation** (Multi-stakeholder collaborative processes): Conducted research to establish potential partnership list of organisations
- **Ideation** (Multi-stakeholder collaborative processes): Met with individual organisations and conduct needs assessment / survey [McGill Queer Grad Club (young adults) and Gay & Grey (older adults)] to create a baseline risk management and to design the next steps (focus on creating a safe(r) trauma-informed space)
- **Invention** (Prototyping): Based on results, designed pilot/prototype art-making storytelling event working with the support of organisations such as Social Impact Consulting and local artists.
- **Invention** (Testing): Organised and conduct event
- **Adoption and Impact** (Measuring Impact and Scaling): Surveyed participants and analysed results to design the bigger project, Phase 2

Time period

(September 4th - December 15th / 16 weeks)

- September 5 - October 9 = Ideation
- September 9 - November 18 = Invention
- November 18 - December 15 = Adoption and Impact



Budget lines included

- Project Manager
 - ★ Melissa-Ann Pereira Ledo (she/her/elle/they), is of Azoraian settler background, and was born and raised here in Tiohtiá:ke/Montréal. She is a queer mother, educator, artist, and PhD student doing queer arts related work. She has held many roles from curriculum developer, non-profit founder and director, and educational consultant.
- Gift Cards for survey participants: marginalised communities are often taken advantage of for extractive research purposes, this is a symbolic gesture that acknowledges the sharing of valued knowledge and offers a small compensation incentive for participants' time.
- Development and delivering of workshop by Teaching Artists
- Development and delivering of opener and closer by an Indigenous Elder and youth Knowledge Keepers [Refers to an Indigenous person who has attained great knowledge of history, carries wisdom, and has traditional teachings]
- Hiring an Active Listener, an on-call, peer-to-peer service to provide emotional support at the event. Sometimes emotions arise during tough conversations and creative practices, like art making, can bring up feelings and individuals may benefit from the extra support to talk to someone.
- Support from [Social Impact Consulting](#) (coaching / project management support, co-design & co-facilitation of event, outreach support for participants, de-brief / contribute to analysis & report)
- Logistics of event: Food; Supplies; Videographer; and ASL Interpreter

Pre-Event Consultations

The Agreements for the day were compiled after meeting with two Advisory groups: Gay & Grey, and the McGill Queer Grad Club. These groups were asked three questions and brainstormed their responses through discussion and/or collective mind mapping. The three questions were:

- What would make you feel welcome / safe in an environment with youth/elders?
- What are your hopes and expectations for queer/trans for intergenerational work? (concerns and ideas)



- What types of arts events would you like to see?

The overarching result of these consultations was that participants coming to the day arrive with an openness to deeply listen, learn, and to share as they are comfortable. The fundamental pillars of the day were set: Respect and Exchange.

Based on these consultations we also hired an Active Listener, to set up in a “calm corner” as proactive trauma-informed practice at creating a safer environment. We also established the rule of saying “Rainbow” as a response for any participant who is being asked something that “crosses boundaries” by another participant.

The following agreements were crafted based on these consultations.

Agreements

1. We agree to be open to listen and to learn
2. We agree to be present as much possible and avoid outside distractions
3. We agree to share the talking space by taking turns, ensure everyone has a chance to share if they wish to, and have a “yes and..” attitude (instead of a “but” attitude)
4. We agree to be respectful of and celebrate our differences and diverse identities, honour the experiences and stories of everyone, and make efforts towards equity in our group
5. We agree to use kind and inclusive language, and be patient when others are learning something new
6. We agree to support each other and make sure everyone feels as welcome and safe as possible, regardless of age or identity
7. We agree that we are here to build friendships, and respect each other's and our own boundaries, and share as we feel comfortable when we are engaging more difficult conversations
8. We agree to invite in queer joy, have fun, try our best and be brave in making art, remembering that we are always learning, and are engaging in a new project.





Team

Team for November 18th event

Project Manager: Melissa-Ann Pereira Ledo

Teaching Artist Team: Jacky Lo, Quinlan Green, Andrea Palmer and Felicia Green

Videographer / Photographer: Chris Lau

Admin Team: Jacky Lalonde, Arlen Bonnar

Consultant Team: Marlo Turner and Loralie Bromby

Support Team: Julien J, Andrew Desrochers, Angela Belleau, and Vania Djelani

Graphic Designer: Mariah Singh

MAC representatives: Yaël Filipovic and Vincent Brière

Knowledge Keeper: Diane Labelle



Photo taken during planning meeting on November 1st 2023



Summary of Event

Date: **Saturday, November 18th, 2023**

Location: **Museum of Contemporary Art in Montreal** (provided to exChange in-kind)

Attendees:

37 people participated in this event. This included 15 team members and 22 participants, of which 11 were older adults (over 55 years old) and 11 were younger adults (under 55 years old).

Schedule of the day

Schedule - Nov 18th 2023	
9:30	Coffee and Snacks served
10:00	Welcome Review of Agreements
10:10	Opening Circle with Falcia Green, Teaching Artist, and Diane Labelle, Indigenous Knowledge Keeper
10:40	Three 30 min Workshops with each Teaching Artist: Jacky Lo, Quinlan Green, and Andrea Palmer
12:10	Lunch Photographer/Videographer conducted interviews
1:00	Closing Circle
1:30	Event is completed Free to visit the MAC!



Workshop descriptions



Emotional Baggage:

Embellishing tote bags to share stories and unite the community.

This workshop sparked self-reflection and appreciation for the self and others. The workshop utilised collaborative, teamwork, and communicational skills that can be applied beyond this session. By the end of the workshop, participants were able to acknowledge the differences and similarities that unite our community through storytelling and sharing their experiences. Through using storytelling as a tool, they witnessed how vulnerability can be a strength for creating connections.

Conversation focused on the topic of emotional baggage (hence the workshop title) and was an attempt to flip the narrative to something positive. Participants focused on acknowledging the past, present, futures, and new futures. Each participant was able to walk away with a tote bag that was personal and meaningful. The act of using these bags in public will create visibility and representation of their journey or the self.



Guiding questions for the workshop

What represents you and your journey that is important or empowers you?

How can our emotional baggage be our strengths?



Post-it/Mind-Mapping: Envision Storytelling Documenting and Platforms

During this workshop a conversation began around the theme of types of *queer storytelling* that the participants are interested in (example: books, films, plays, etc.), ideas of what stories are missing in the public domain, what stories they want to hear more of, and how they want to explore and communicate these stories (types of *art making*) – now and for the future (archiving stories). Participants also began thinking about: how they want to engage in terms of the role they want to take on at future events; and what new skills they want to learn/explore; Space was also provided for participants to begin to get to know each other. Participants walked away excited about the next steps/phase of the project. Results can be seen by clicking [here](#).



Guiding questions for the workshop

**What Art Making Activities Need to happen?
What kinds of platforms would be cool for sharing our stories?**





Mural Workshop: Somatic grounding progressing outward to collective expression.

In this workshop, participants explored individual feelings and mindfulness, engaging in collective breathing and body-scans. Questions centred on redefining queer identity, fostering rich discussions during the 30-minute rotations.. Despite varying movement preferences, everyone comfortably rooted in breath and body-scans.

They then focused on creating paper mural-tiles allowing expression of personal connections to queer identity, history, and belonging. The tiles effectively kept track of participants' ideas and reflections. These tiles were then laid out on canvas, for a collaborative result.



Guiding questions for the workshop

How do we see and describe a queer identity in ourselves, how is this be seen by other people, how can this be used in guiding dialogue?



Other activities that took place at the event

The Calm Corner

- ❖ Based on the pre-event consultations an Active Listener was hired. They set up in a “calm corner” as proactive trauma-informed practice at creating a safer environment.

One of our Knowledge Keepers and Active Listener were present for the full event in the Calm Corner. They hoped to share healthy coping mechanisms with participants when it came to dealing with potentially triggering conversations. They also hoped to help participants: understand physical, mental, and spiritual boundaries and reinforce them safely; and become comfortable expressing when breaks are needed when discussing potentially uncomfortable/triggering topics. The goals were to create a space for participants to go if they needed to talk with an active listener and/or take a break.

Guiding Questions for this area was: *How can I be safe and kind to myself and others?*

- ❖ This area was accessed by participants when they felt overwhelmed, and/or needed a minute to be mindful.



Two informal dialogue groups at lunch

- ❖ Andrew and Falcia hosted a dialogue for folks who have any questions about the “alphabet soup - 2SLGBTQIA+” and/or on “they/them” pronouns. (this was a request that came from our consultation with Gay & Grey)
- ❖ Arlen hosted a dialogue that focused on living through the AIDS epidemic with resilience and joy.



Opening/Closing

We began the day with a land acknowledgement, and opening words by our Indigenous knowledge keepers (one older adult and one younger adult), medicine lighting, and drum songs. We closed in the same way.



More pictures from the event, completed artworks, and a video of the event can be seen <https://www.exchangeproject.ca>



Feedback

The following are quotes selected from responses to our participants' survey about the day.

Growth, sharing, being your true self.

Having to visualize my journey to the person I am today was eye-opening. From a nerdy POV, it was fascinating to see what other people included in the tote bags.

Lovely having the intergenerational feedback.

Moderator did a good job of keeping us all on track and I enjoyed having the chance to share in the icebreaker. This was a great workshop to start the day with.

Sharing my own and hearing the other participants sharing their sections of the mural and things they has written was so affecting and healing.

I loved being able to connect to people that I otherwise wouldn't have met. Meeting older queer folks gives me hope about my own future because it's very rare.

Falicia's opening and closing of the event. I feel very privileged to have been present for such beautiful and meaningful moments.

It was great meeting such a cross-section of people in our community.

It's important for me to recognize my preconceived notions about myself and others and be able to move past those notions so I can connect with others.

...there are a lot of people who want to share and learn from one another. There was so much creativity and passion amongst the groups. I loved hearing from the older queer folks, I really learned a lot from them. Even though there are generations separating us, a lot of our struggles and experiences remain the same. I'm very grateful to have participated.



The following are screen captures of participants' responses to this specific question on the survey.

If you would like, please provide a short testimonial on how this event helped you or the impact it may have had on you that we may use for future publications?

"I had a wonderful time sharing experiences and resources and learning about the paths my elders have taken and are still looking to explore."

"I didn't know what to expect, but was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the attendees and the interesting subjects presented."

"Time well spent in a light & convivial atmosphere with nice folks making fun things & having smart & interesting exchanges ."

"When you're in a room full of other queer people, your people, the energy of that room shifts. It's in the exhale that you realize you've been holding your breath. There will always be a need to have more queer spaces, because we all need to breathe."

"Participating in this event gave me hope. Hope that the type of events, knowledge transfer, and community-building that I envision as a community development practitioner is possible. Not only is it possible, but is also embraced with support and love. It reminded me that I am in fact not alone; that there are others who are queer, neurodivergent, and creative who are making an impact and are successful. Participating in an event like exChange was a big step for me, and I'm grateful that I took a leap of faith. "

"It broke barriers between the age and socio-economic groups involved."

"The event has filled me with greater hope for better communication and understanding in the future. That we are laying the groundwork for an important conversation with one another that lifts up and celebrates who we are and how we can move forward together."

"I enjoyed connecting with young queer people"

"I felt privileged to be part of something new - I felt that this was a great success and would get even better with time."



Closing Remarks

Word from the project manager



It was a deep honour and privilege to have been invited to lead this important initiative. As an educator, artist, and researcher, my work focuses on curriculum development, queering curriculum, ideas of representation, community building amongst educators, intergenerational work, and facilitating through the arts, with a focus on how to best support marginalized youth. I believe this project to be the convergence of these areas.

The atmosphere at the event was contagious, bursting with eagerness to connect, and gratitude to be sharing the intergenerational space together. There was a sense of safety created in the unfamiliar becoming familiar very quickly. I have very rarely felt the kind of energy that surrounded the team and participants on that day. The words that come to mind are: *pure intergenerational queer joy!*

Reflecting on the several recommendations that emerged from the project team and participants, through the various debriefs, surveys and post-event conversations, it is clear that the largest and most urgent request was for future exChange Intergenerational events. Based on the recommendations, it was suggested that these events incorporate two major adjustments. These included: 1) Ideas for enhancing future events by broadening our reach, such as expanding our networks by connecting with more BIPOC individuals and collaborating with Diane Labelle to involve more 2S youth and elders; and 2) Ideas for fostering deeper exchanges through longer guided dialogues and larger focused art-making activities. The other recommendation worth noting was the request to establish an advisory committee for the upcoming iterations of the exChange events. Additionally, there was a call to create dialogue events specifically tailored for community organizations serving the English 2SLGBTQI+ population in



Montreal/Tiohtià:ke, with a focus on intergenerational dialogue.

With much gratitude for this opportunity, I look forward to seeing how this initiative will blossom into a new intergenerational community of 2SLGBTQI+ English speaking individuals of Montreal/Tiohtià:ke, and how we will move forward to the next phase, and share our work on a broader scale!

Warmly, Queerly, and Gratefully,
Melissa

