



I love being one  
with the people and  
doing fieldwork...the  
community is great”

**A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION  
OF THE INVESTIGAYTORS PROGRAM**

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On November 14, 2019, eight program participants took part in a focus group to discuss and qualitatively evaluate the Investigaytors program in Vancouver, Canada. Topics covered in the focus group included: (1) Motivating factors for volunteering with Investigaytors; (2) Recent Investigaytors projects; (3) Professional development; and (4) Opportunities for improvement.

The focus group was held at the offices of the Community-Based Research Centre (CBRC). All participants attended in-person. American Sign Language-English interpretation was provided. All participants identified as cis-gender and gay. The focus group was facilitated by the program coordinator and one external researcher who was familiar with the program. Focus group participants received dinner and were not compensated for their time. The evaluation was reviewed by the University of British Columbia Providence Health Care Research Ethics Board (H19-02704). Program participants were not required to take part in the focus group. Participants signed an informed consent form prior to participating. The focus group was audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and de-identified using fake names chosen by the participants.

Findings from the focus group along with illustrative quotes are summarized in this report.

# MOTIVATING FACTORS FOR PARTICIPATING WITH INVESTIGAYTORS

Focus group participants noted several motivating factors for volunteering with the Investigaytors program, including building social connections and developing research skills. For example, participants highlighted that volunteering with Investigaytors was a great opportunity to make friends and connect with other queer guys in a non-sexualized space.

“ I was kind of new to Coquitlam and new to the country and generally didn’t know kind of many people in or out of my community...meeting in a like a non-sexualized space is really nice to have.” – Nathan

“ It allowed me to meet a whole bunch of people that has expanded my circle now.” - Siri

“ I’m really glad that I did decide to come because I got to meet so many great people and work on like projects with you all.” – Alec

Through participating in weekly in-person meetings, program volunteers met other young queer men, engaged with research and community mentors, and worked closely together as a cohort through every step of the research cycle. Both the community-based research process, as well as generating knowledge about the health of queer men, translated to a greater sense of community connectedness for participants.

In addition to developing social connections, participants noted that gaining hands-on

research experience was another motivating factor for volunteering with the Investigaytors program. Participants described both quantitative and qualitative research skills gained through participating in the program.

“ I just think the Investigaytors and CBRC are unique... it’s more nerdy [laughs] and every week we’re actually working on projects... we get to see the outcome of all of our efforts and work, which I really value.” – Siri

“ I’ve really enjoyed it. And I’m really enjoying my time with Investigaytors and I’ve just learned so much about qualitative research, and I’m just really kind of fascinated with the whole thing, and I didn’t expect to be involved with that research and I really didn’t think that it was going to interest me, but it has.” – Drake

“ I really wanted to explore what there was in like science and gay men’s health and all this like public health domain...it just made me really excited about what I could do in this program and see how I could potentially grow” – Alec

Participants enjoyed the project-oriented nature of the program, as well as learning about science and research in the context of queer men’s health. In this way, volunteers learn new skills and contribute to projects that are relevant to their communities or reflect their own lived experiences.

# RECENT INVESTIGAYTORS PROJECTS

Participants were asked to describe their involvement in recent Investigaytors projects in order to characterize the community-based research process. Two Investigaytors-led projects were described in detail: (1) a qualitative research project; and (2) the development of a sexual health resource.

## Qualitative PrEP Project

The Investigaytors described a qualitative research project conducted in partnership with the CBRC, BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU), University of Victoria, and Health Initiative for Men (HIM) on the topic of HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP). One participant described the objective of the project as:

“ To investigate the pathways that guides our accessing PrEP in the community from people who either have accessed PrEP or were very interested in accessing PrEP, and sort of understand their motivations, as well as any roadblocks or issues that they encountered” – Siri

The Investigaytors program aims to meaningfully involve participants at every step of the research cycle. Participants were asked to reflect on their involvement in the project and describe the community-based research process:

“ We looked at the ethics forms and see, and we were like looking to see if there were anything that we can change about it. And then eventually we moved on to designing the interview guide, and at that point then we started to do recruiting and interviews with actual participants then ... shadowing

with an experienced researcher and interviewer. And then eventually we could then take the lead if we felt brave enough to do it, and then we proceeded with the qualitative data analysis, running workshops, learning about NVivo and that kind of thing.” – Matisse

“ I was able to do my first qualitative interview where I was mostly shadowing but I also asked a few questions. And that was a really nice experience for me to get some more like hands-on experience. And then from there I was involved with choosing and designing my own query and in order to figure out what analysis I wanted to do, and then doing some coding in NVivo [qualitative data management software] and ultimately presenting the findings at the Summit Conference in 2019, which was exciting too because it was my first time presenting at a conference.” – Luke

Here participants described their involvement with providing feedback on the ethics application, designing the qualitative interview guide, primary data collection, and knowledge translation at an annual conference. Collaborating with academic partners



provided Investigaytors program participants the opportunity to learn from experienced researchers through shadowing, which is a critical component of capacity-building. Reflecting on the community-based research process as a whole, one participant described the process as equal, despite the involvement of academic partners:

“ I was very comfortable. I didn’t feel any fear going into it. I didn’t feel like nervous or anything. It was a very friendly environment for me to be in,

and nobody thought that they were necessarily better than anyone else. So it was a very fair, equal kind of feeling environment.” - Drake

These experiences were new to many program participants, as no previous research experience is required to participate in Investigaytors. A community-report outlining the findings from this research is available on the website of the CBRC.

### Sexual Health Resource

In addition to the qualitative research project, participants described their involvement in the development of a related sexual health resource targeted to young sexual minority men on the topic of PrEP. Participants described the objective of the resource as:

“ The main intention around the PrEP toolkit was to I guess fill in a kind of knowledge gap that many people didn’t know how to access PrEP through B.C.’s PrEP program and acknowledging that like it is a complicated process that was unlike kind of accessing other drugs in the province. So kind of the need was there for better information.”  
– Nathan

Through a series of capacity building workshops led by public health professionals, program participants learned about HIV PrEP and the process of developing a sexual health resource. Following a community-based approach, program participants were involved at every step of developing the PrEP resource; this included brainstorming elements that would be included in the toolkit and writing the text in a way that was accessible and relevant to the target population. Participants

described why the Investigaytors were uniquely positioned to develop a resource targeted to sexual minority men:

“ What I find really great about this, because then it’s the information that’s presented to you, while it is derived from medical sources, we try and make it as interesting as we can...I think as people within our community, not everyone is going to speak the same language we do.” – Matisse

“ I think the thing that I enjoyed the most about this was that it was community-led. Like you see a lot of health resources published by, you know, the Government of Canada and like you don’t necessarily know who prepared that resource, who was consulted on in preparing that resource, and, you know, knowing kind of particularly the kind of the little kind of introductory piece about like who are the Investigaytors? I think that that adds so much credibility.” – Nathan

Participants believed that their shared experience with the target audience was

precisely what contributed to the success of the PrEP resource. The sexual health resource can be found on the website of the CBRC ([www.cbrc.net/PrEPinBC](http://www.cbrc.net/PrEPinBC)).



# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Volunteers described capacity building and professional development opportunities that arose from their involvement with the Investigaytors program. For example, one participant described that volunteering with the program informed their future school and careers plans:

“ Going into Investigaytors program, I was able to actually build up the tools, like build up my toolkit and get these skills, and see like, ‘Oh, I like doing this, but I don’t like doing this’.. it helped me direct what I want to do in my future and helped me figure out what program I wanted to go into for school.” – Eric

Consistently, participants described how volunteering with the Investigaytors program provided tangible research skills and networking opportunities that supported career advancement:

“ I got a job because of Investigaytors, and so that’s like a huge props to the program because it allowed me to network in the community and get a job in data analysis and research... I use these skills every single day” – Siri

Another attendee noted being able to apply what they have learned to another community that they are a part of:

“ I’ve learned a lot. It’s helped me a lot to see the big picture, and it’s a real benefit for my skillset...even for my resume... I haven’t done – there’s not a lot of research, deaf research, deaf people doing research, and to come here and be involved in this, it’s really helpful and useful for me to develop skills and also to apply that to the deaf community.” – Drake

As brought forward by participants, skills gained through participation in the Investigaytors program were perceived as transferrable and supportive of professional development.





## OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Finally, participants were asked what they would change about the community-based research process, as well as Investigaytors program as a whole. With regard to the qualitative research project, participants described challenges with data storage and access:

“ The other piece was just around privacy, and not being able to take the transcripts out of the office was really tough. There was such a small window to work on things, and personally, I'm not someone who can usually work with a lot of people around...so I found that really challenging.” – Siri

This finding reflects the fact that Investigaytors only meet for two hours every week, which can present challenges for analyzing qualitative data, as this process can take a significant amount of time to read, interpret, and synthesize data. This finding also has important implications for conducting community-based research with university partners. While privacy and data storage is critically important, university partners should work with REBs to ensure that data can be made as accessible to community partners as possible and acknowledge that community-based research processes may look different than research within academic settings.

Another finding that was relevant to both the qualitative project and the sexual health resource was that program participants expressed that they wanted greater involvement in some steps of the research cycle that were outsourced:

“ I'm thankful I didn't have to transcribe [the data]. It's very valuable but not enjoyable, really. [Laughs] And... and so that, that was a challenge because I couldn't spend as much time with the data as I wanted to.” – Nathan

“ The challenge was not having input in the graphic design of the project, particularly not having enough input in the art direction” – Matisse

For these projects, a professional transcriptionist was hired to transcribe the audio recordings of qualitative interviews and a graphic designer was hired to help design the sexual health resource. Additionally, a member of the Investigaytors program was hired to code some of the qualitative interviews. While outsourcing these project activities expedited the research process, it may have resulted in missed capacity building opportunities and a feeling of being disconnected from the end result.

Finally, participants reflected on opportunities to improve the program as a whole. In particular, participants expressed that they would appreciate more opportunities to socialize with each other both during and outside Investigaytors hours. This reflects a motivating factor in volunteering with the program, which is that Investigaytors is a social activity and an opportunity to meet other community-minded queer men. Future programming should be intentional about scheduling time for Investigaytors program participants to get to know each other and socialize.

Second, some participants felt that there were opportunities to make the program more inclusive. For example, the program should work towards being more accessible for folks from varying educational backgrounds, as well as folks from non-represented identities, such as trans, non-binary, and bisexual identities. One suggestion to accomplish this is to avoid advertising the program as being for “gay men,” which could include changing the name “Investigaytors” to an inclusive alternative.

