



# The ! AM Initiative

Pronounced 'I am'



## What is the ! AM Initiative?

The ! AM initiative was created to improve the experience of 2SLGBTQIA+ mentors and mentees at BBBST. The initiative was developed from direct feedback from mentors, mentees, and parents/guardians.

The ! AM initiative intends to improve knowledge, training, advocacy, and programming to make our organization more inclusive.

## What's the goal?

The ! AM Initiative is committed to supporting and advocating for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community within Toronto. The initiative intends to develop programming to provide a 2SLGBTQIA+ appropriate role model to a young person to limit the long-lasting impacts that 2SLGBTQIA+ related trauma can have on a youth's development.

At BBBST, we champion the health and wellbeing of youth by stepping in before it's too late, to give EVERY child and youth a chance to reach their full potential!

## Why "! AM"?

We named our 2SLGBTQIA+ initiative "! AM" with the intention that all mentors and mentees can come as they are. They don't need to label themselves or fit into a certain box to access mentorship. The intention of using "! AM" is to allow the individual to fill in the blank and self-identify what best fits them.

Some mentors and mentees aren't sure how they want to identify and at BBBST coming just as you are is enough! The goal is to empower the individual to identify who they are in their own time and share the parts of their identity they find most important.

## What has the ! AM Initiative accomplished so far?

The ! AM initiative is working hard to create more inclusive and intentional programming for 2SLGBTQIA+ mentors and mentees.

Below you can find a couple highlights of the initiative's accomplishments so far. This section will continue to grow as the ! AM initiative expands and achieves new goals.

**Big Siblings:** "Big Siblings" was added as an official program title operating under the Community Based 1:1 program. By adding the Big Siblings title, we are beginning to address the gender binary within the Big Brothers Big Sisters Programs. Big Siblings supports mentors and mentees that do not feel as though they align with the Big Brothers or Big Sisters programs. Big Siblings also became the first step in assessing the need for a 2SLGBTQIA+ focused mentorship program.

**Research & Feedback:** Members of the ! AM initiative conducted 1:1 interviews with mentors, mentees, and parent/guardians from the Big Siblings program to receive feedback on their experience within our organization and inform future goals for the ! AM Initiative. We will continue to seek feedback and input from those who identify as part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community as we continue our work.

**Training:** Providing staff with 2SLGBTQIA+ training opportunities to enhance their knowledge and improve their practice with 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals. This is an ongoing goal as at BBBST we are committed to continuous learning and professional development.

**Community Consultation:** We have engaged and consulted with several community agencies who are willing to share knowledge and partner with our agency for collective impact. Some of those include: Ten Oaks, Friends of Ruby and the 519. They have all committed to attending and supporting roundtable discussions hosted by the ! AM initiative.

## What is the ! AM Initiative working on?

- Developing a specialized mentorship program for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.
- Continuing to increase our presence in the community through creating partnerships with 2SLGBTQIA+ community organizations in Toronto.
- More 2SLGBTQIA+ focused training for all staff.
- Working closely with all departments at BBBST to ensure all forms and processes are inclusive.
- 2SLGBTQIA+ focused training for Mentors
- Promotion and recruitment of mentors and mentees.