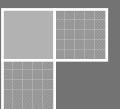




# WRRC Community Conversation Report

WRRC Life – October 21, 2010

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The Waterloo Region Rainbow Coalition (WRRC) was formed in Fall 2010 because members of the Rainbow Community in Waterloo Region felt there was a lack of advocacy and unity among the groups in our community. We define the “Rainbow Community” as those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, intersex, queer, questioning, fluid, unlabelled, asexual, straight allies, and all other members of our community who are interested in increasing awareness and inclusivity of gender and sexual diversity. We are a fully grassroots community group, that is non-profit, and intends to compliment the current resources and services in Waterloo Region.

We decided to hold three “community conversations” in October and November 2010 to hear from the community about what their thoughts are regarding the status of the Rainbow Community in Waterloo Region. The purpose of these conversations is to bring the community together to identify and begin working together towards improving the Rainbow Community in Waterloo Region..

The first conversation was held October 21, 2010 from 6:30-9:30pm. This event was intended to gather ideas, thoughts and feedback from the Rainbow community about their experiences in Waterloo Region and what issues they feel are of most importance to the community. Approximately 50 enthusiastic people attended the first community conversation; some of them were new to Waterloo Region or new to the Rainbow Community. We had people representing many diverse groups who collaboratively worked to narrow down the broad issues that are currently facing the Rainbow Community. First, a large group discussion took place, followed by two smaller group discussions where participants discussed the identified issues in detail. Overall, six broad themes emerged out of this first community conversation. We have summarized the themes, focusing on the main ideas expressed within each theme, to help us move forward in the two upcoming community conversations.

### **1. Community Building**

It was identified that a sense of “community” is an important issue in the Rainbow Community in Waterloo Region. There was a reoccurring theme that a central location needs to be established in the form of a community centre which can be the organizing location for continued work in the Rainbow Community. There is also a strong need for resources, services and support to be identified and made available at this central location, and the information to be made available/distributed from this central location to those seeking the information. It was noted that there is a long history of the Rainbow community in Waterloo Region, but it is important to focus on celebrating, and strengths as well as working on improving access to services, support and resources.

### **2. Allies**

An overarching idea from the Rainbow Community was that Straight Allies do not get the recognition that they deserve. This could be established by creating a symbol for Allies, and by finding ways to increase awareness and visibility as well as celebrating their contributions to the Rainbow Community. Secondly, the need for training and

services for allies was stressed as important. Included in this training would be the option to train local agencies and organizations in supporting the Rainbow Community, and giving them the language and resources to communicate the importance and benefits of being an Ally, as well as creating safety for people and organizations to “come out” as Allies. Finally, there should be an opportunity to build alliances between the Rainbow community and the Allies. Along with the idea of a central location for a community centre, was the hope for a designated space for Allies in the community centre as well. It was mentioned that referring to the LGBTQ community as the “Rainbow Community” was more accepting language to use.

### **3. Lack of Services**

One of the biggest issues identified was the lack of a central location for the Rainbow Community. This central location would host meetings, community space, social activities, peer support networks and more. The second issue was the lack of one central location for an electronic resource database/calendar. Currently, unless you belong to certain groups in the community, or are on their individual mailing list, then you need to check all the websites or call for information about upcoming events. Many people also felt a strong need for a directory to find the community resources they were seeking. It was also identified this would be helpful for newcomers to the community as well. Thirdly, there was an expressed interest in creating a mentoring system that offered one on one support for newly “out,” or for members who are new to Waterloo Region and our local Rainbow Community.

### **4. Discrimination and Harassment**

Community members candidly shared their stories of discrimination, harassment and other forms of prejudice. Most of these included experiences with individuals and organizations related to policing, education, and healthcare. In all three sectors, the following issues were noted: a lack of services aimed specifically at the Rainbow community, a prevalence of misinformation and prejudice, a lack of visible support for the Rainbow community on behalf of service organizations, not knowing whether services or individuals are welcoming, a fear of using services (e.g., reporting hate crimes), and the lack of appropriate and welcoming resources for transfolk. Providing outreach and education with all three of these sectors was seen as important to address gaps in knowledge, awareness and skill. Also important is the need to address prejudice (e.g., sexism, racism) from within the Rainbow community. Many people suggested having someone from the Rainbow community provide outreach to Waterloo Region.

### **5. Information and Awareness**

Many people said the visibility of existing Rainbow services, groups and events is lacking. There was consensus that the lack of a central location makes it difficult to connect with the Rainbow community. Examples that were suggested included: a central calendar, resource list, a Rainbow publication/blog, all of which would be updated regularly and be available in multiple formats. As well as the need for a

central location, it was suggested that a staff member would represent the Rainbow community on various committees and provide information in the community when needed. Finally, it was identified that a lack of reliable data and statistics about our community makes it difficult to organize, secure funding, and advocate for change.

## **6. Unity and Diversity**

A disconnect was identified between various “niche” groups in the community. Groups work in isolation and are fragmented, which leads to a lack of visibility in general. It was suggested that more opportunities are needed to bring people together to build community. The challenge with the Rainbow community is that there are no clear “boundaries”; and a lot of intersection of multiple identities. Community-building efforts need to take this into account, uniting people while respecting difference. Also, it was acknowledged that there are groups this initiative may not be reaching, so more outreach must be undertaken. In particular, racialized communities, and people from non-Western ethno-cultural communities are generally not well represented within the local Rainbow community. There are also unique challenges faced by elders and youth.

A similar report will be completed after each of the conversations, in order to further inform and engage the community in this initiative. A final report will also be produced after all three conversations have taken place. We encourage agencies and services providers in Waterloo Region to attend the events and reference these reports while engaging with and supporting the Rainbow Community.

For more information about this initiative, please contact us at [wrrc10@gmail.com](mailto:wrrc10@gmail.com) or through the Facebook group (search for Waterloo Region Rainbow Coalition).