



WRRC Community Conversation Report

WRRC Plans – November 18, 2010

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Introduction

The Waterloo Region Rainbow Coalition (WRRC) was formed in fall 2010 because some members of the Rainbow* community in Waterloo Region felt there was a lack of advocacy and unity among the various individuals and groups in our community. We are a fully grassroots community group, that is non-profit, and intends to compliment the current resources and services in Waterloo Region.

WRRC's current objective is to hold a series of three "community conversations" throughout October and November 2010. The purpose of these conversations is to bring the community together to identify and begin working towards building a unified Rainbow Community in Waterloo Region. We intend to strengthen our community through advocacy, building awareness, increasing inclusion and by developing a unified voice and vision for the Rainbow Community.

Each of the three conversations will reveal new ideas and possibilities to give the WRRC feedback on how to proceed so we can start problem-solving the issues that we have collectively identified. This is a collaborative community-building process that we hope will strengthen the local Rainbow community to discover and start working on sustainable solutions. After these three meetings, WRRC will proceed based on community consensus.

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The third meeting of the three conversations was held on November 18, 2010. Approximately 30 people attended this conversation; several had also attended the first or second event. The goal of this evening was to break into smaller groups and focus on four major projects areas that were identified in the previous group meeting,. The four small projects included the following: Coalition, Education & Awareness, Physical Space, and Website. The six previous topics that were identified (i.e. community building, allies, unity & diversity, lack of services, discrimination & harassment and information and awareness), were to be included in the small group discussions about the four project areas. At the start of the meeting, everyone was asked in a large group how they would like to define the scope of each of the four projects, so there could be a framework to work from when the projects started their execution in January 2011. After discussing the four projects briefly, we asked all four groups to break into their smaller project groups. Besides defining the parameters of the project, and referring to the six themes mentioned above, the goal at the end of the small group discussion was to create a small paragraph to describe the project that will be used to recruit new project members in January 2011. Then people signed up for the project they wanted to work on. They were limited to one project this time so we could get as many ideas as possible together in each of the four groups. (When we proceed in January 2011, people can participate in as many of the four groups as they choose. We will accommodate participation in all of them at our next WRRC meeting in January). Then everyone divided into their smaller groups, and discussed the four projects along with the six themes. After the small group meetings, we came back together as a large group again to debrief about the process, and thank the participants for their time. The following is a summary of the results of the small group discussions:

1. *Coalition*: The format of the Coalition was discussed, and the need for a clear infrastructure that would ensure that people would stick to their positions so leadership "burn out" would not happen. The idea of a (possibly rotating) central leadership "hub" was discussed, including people that represented different sectors

* 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.

† of the community. The core hub would include community representatives, lgbtq members, newcomers, and allies from diverse backgrounds.* The desire to be open, grass roots, and use a democratic approach while being community led was also deemed important. Some policies and guidelines would need to be developed, along with a clear nomination process for leaders, and clarity about how to resolve conflict (use of a mediator), and delegate responsibilities. The importance of being accountable and transparent was discussed. Language is essential to keeping everyone included, as well as giving everyone the opportunity to voice their concerns and become involved. It is important that people only speak for themselves. The idea of a unified front with multiple voices was envisioned. The role of the Coalition would be to partner and work with other local service providers and organizations to make sure the Rainbow Community receives the services and supports that it needs. Therefore, liaising with service providers and organizations is an important function of the hub. The need to recruit, inspire, and motivate people to get involved is also important. There would need to be someone to handle volunteer management, communications and media, and people who will train those who will be involved in the Coalition, as well as service providers and organizations who wish to work with the Rainbow Community. The possibility of reaching out to other communities, cities and townships was discussed as future plans once the Coalition is established.

2. *Education & Awareness* – WRRRC should work with existing groups to find out where the gaps are, and how to compliment the existing training. A component of training should be outreach to local service providers and organizations (i.e. police services, the Board of Education) to find out what training is needed. This could be done in a survey format online. The training should include lgbtq members and allies from diverse backgrounds, as well as local service providers and organizations. Training should dispel myths, educate about who is included in the Rainbow Community, and increase the knowledge of language and inclusivity. It could consist of small activities that are facilitated by a number of people with different skills and expertise. Training should target the complexity and diversity of the Rainbow Community, and be offered to members of the lgbtq community, and anyone else that lives in Waterloo Region. There should be a progression to the learning by offering a “Rainbow Community 101” workshop, along with an intermediate and an advanced class, as well as a specific training for allies. Ally training could include information about the ally spectrum, breaking down events from history and the role of allies. Partnering with existing ally training groups such as GLOW, or HSSE (Heterosexual for Same Sex Equality) would also help grow the ally program. Also, offering training about specific sectors of the Rainbow Community (i.e. seniors or youth), as well as offering specialized trainings to key service providers and organizations (i.e. health care) would also be a good approach. The training should take an anti-oppression and human rights perspective, and a “core” training could be developed, then specific material could be added or taken away depending on who the group is that we are training. Training needs to be unique and take a dynamic approach to attract people to it. In order to get creative, a tagline or “motto” could be developed, and there should be numerous ways that we advertise this training (i.e. newspaper, radio, online, through Rainbow businesses, during other local events etc). A community inventory, as well as a central database of service and information is important to create and use during this training. Including a timeline of local history would be interesting and useful to help attendees learn about the local Rainbow Community.

3. *Physical Space*: The vision for a Rainbow or “Wellness” Centre would be consciously and deliberately safe as well as accessible and recognized in Waterloo Region. There should be one central satellite location with the

* The original members who founded WRRRC in the Fall of 2010 decided to open up Coalition membership to the community of Waterloo Region to be more inclusive. The future direction of this Coalition and/or future groups that result may not include all the “founding” members, because participation is voluntary. This is a community-based and community run Coalition, so the structure will be created collaboratively by the community, starting January 2011.

possibly of other locations in the future. The space could be shared with other rainbow agencies. The space should be community funded (i.e. City of Kitchener, other Rainbow businesses or interested agencies). The physical space could be run by a board of directors with one main director, staff (service providers, marketing and fundraising), and volunteers. This space would need the physical location, furniture (desk, chairs, magazine rack, bookshelf, coffee maker, area rug, lamps, computer, fax, photocopier etc). There would also need to be internet, utilities, a secured entrance, as well as insurance. The ideal space would be large, with an open space for reception and the main area/library, as well as separate rooms to host groups or events. There would also be a separate space for peer support and allies.

4. *Website:* The main purpose of the website would be to host and disseminate information that is relevant to the Rainbow Community that is kept up to date. The website should be used as a tool, with a complete directory for people to access local information and services. The website would be welcoming to people are newly coming out, as well as people who have been out. The intention of the website is to facilitate growth and community building that includes regular contributors. It would encourage in-person meetings, groups and activities, and be the “hub” of the Rainbow Community. Services, organizations and groups that currently exist could contribute and have space on the website as well. There would be a link to major service providers and organizations (i.e. Waterloo Region), and the starting point could be to work with the Grandriver Rainbow Site. Bandwidth needs to be considered for rural users or those with dial up internet services (i.e. have html and flash). Software that could be use includes: Jive, V-Bulletin, Website Tonight. There will be links to other social networking groups such as Facebook, twitter, MySpace, LinkedIn etc., allowing for diverse opportunities to connect.

The layout of the site should have the following features: History of Rainbow Community, “Who are We” (info about WRRRC and Rainbow Community today), event calendar (users and events would be approved), user-created content (forums, blogs, discussion boards, E-Zine, Wikipedia entries, sub-sites), RSS Feed/News feed or announcements section, a directory of businesses (created by local businesses and user recommended), advertising (paid to generate revenue, would be scaled according to what is paid), links to other community resources, an email list (use existing rainbow lists by coordinating with other groups), calendar (printable), photo gallery (with consent of individuals), chat rooms, moderation and a code of conduct (tied to user content, anonymous reporting of offensive/inappropriate material, support (chat rooms, or referrals to in person support). The Tagline could be “Your Community, Your Voice”

Conclusion

The details of the four projects listed above are in the early stages of brainstorming, and decisions still need to be made about the future direction of them. Please note that the four projects are not inclusive of all the projects that could take place through WRRRC. This may change over time depending on the vision of the community members that participate. However, these are the starting projects that will move the Rainbow Community in Waterloo Region forward by establishing itself as a clear and visible local organization. This last meeting was intended to be the start of these discussions, and there will be another meeting set in January of 2011 to continue these discussions and get started working on these projects. The Rainbow Community has also asked WRRRC to continue hosting and facilitating meetings as these projects progress, so watch for news and dates to be posted soon. Please check our website for future meetings and information about the projects as they are worked on in the next several months. Our website is: <http://wrrc.webs.com/>.

Please note that a final, more in depth report will also be produced soon after the third conversation has taken place. We encourage agencies and services providers in Waterloo Region to reference these reports while engaging with and supporting the Rainbow Community in Waterloo Region.