

The History of Pride in The Kitchener Waterloo Region

The Kitchener Waterloo region has a storied and vibrant 2SLGBTQIA+ history. To begin our spotlight on the Gay and Trans community, we will write about some of the organizations and institutions that have been absolute pillars of the 2SLGBTQIA+ movement. The history of gay activism and support stretches back almost 60 years ago into the early 1970s.

Social Institutions Throughout History

Glow

The Centre for Sexual and Gender Diversity is Canada's longest running 2SLGBTQIA+ student organization. The student-run organization began in 1971 at The University of Waterloo, known initially as the Universities' Gay Liberation Movement (WUGLM). The group had its name changed to Gay Liberation of Waterloo in 1980. In 1985 it became Gays & Lesbians of Waterloo to represent the community and celebrations surrounding Pride accurately. Glow is the oldest queer and trans-student-run organization in the country.

Glow is run by student volunteers, offering a variety of discussion groups, social events, advocacy opportunities and awareness and resources.

Other notable institutions that have been major supporters of 2SLGBTQIA+ rights in the region are the Kitchener Public Library and the Princess Cinema, both hosting Drag events. The Princess Cinema has been hosting yearly film showings of The Rocky Horror Picture Show, where attendees and staff are in Drag, since the 1990s. The Kitchener Public Library has been hosting Drag shows since 2017.

Half & Half

Half & Half was a 2SLGBTQIA bar in Downtown Kitchener. Patrons entered through an alley off of Gaukel Street and functioned in a Speakeasy style. The bar later became The Pink Zone and was open until 1994. The RCMP monitored and kept an open file on the bar (as well as GLOW) for "homosexual activity" until the early 1990s.

Tri-Pride Celebrations

The region's first local Pride Celebration was hosted at the Rotunda of Kitchener City Hall. This first local Pride celebration was quickly pulled together by a couple of people and was advertised only by word of mouth and the GLOW List. There have not been posters advertising the event or programmes at the event itself. (<http://www.grandriver-rainbowhistory.ca/>)

Spectrum

Spectrum is Waterloo's first rainbow community space. Spectrum is an inclusive community where all 2SLGBTQ+ individuals are welcomed, celebrated, and recognized as their authentic selves.

On January 17, 2012: The Waterloo Region Rainbow Coalition (WRRRC) sponsored a community meeting at the Walper Hotel. This meeting was called: From Conversation to Action: Building Community Connections. The goal of the meeting was to examine the progress that WRRRC had made over the prior year and then plan for the future of the community.

As of May 4, 2012, Spectrum acquired their own space on 42 Erb St East.

March 31, 2021: On this date, Member of Parliament Bardish Chagger announced that SPECTRUM was one of many organizations receiving grants from the 2SLGBTQ+ Community Capacity Fund.

Waterloo and Kitchener as a region were at the beginning of gay rights in Ontario and Canada as a whole. We will go even deeper into 2SLGBTQ+ activism and representation in the next blog as we examine the contemporary efforts ongoing in the community.

The Best Places to Connect with The Pride Community in the Kitchener Waterloo Region Today

Many of the organizations and groups that were pillars of Waterloo/ Kitchener's past are still operating and at the forefront today. Spectrum has been around for a decade ago and is a well-supported and funded group in the community today. Other key communities and groups in the KW region include

- OK2BME
- Gender Variant Working Group
- Pflag Canada
- ARCH Guelph

OK2BME

OK2BME offers free support and counselling services to 2SLGBTQ+ youth and their families. While a significant focus for the organization is providing counselling and education around 2SLGBTQ+ issues, there are also other events and services to support the community. OK2BME offers other unique services such as Music therapy groups and specialized services for youth, adults and seniors. To learn more about OK2BME events and how to get in touch, visit their website <https://ok2bme.ca/> or find them on social media @OK2BME.

Gender Variant Working Group

Gender Variant Working Group is a grassroots collective based in the Waterloo Region that allows involvement in activism, educational opportunities and local events. The organization holds gender-inclusive events and community activities and promotes community opportunities. Some of the unique services include trans swim nights, accessibility education and gender affirmation products and support services. They can be contacted either through their Facebook page @WWGenderVariance or via email at wwgender.variant@gmail.com.

PFLAG Canada

Pflag Canada is a nationwide organization with a local branch in Waterloo. The local pflag chapter holds a support group for 2SLGBTQIA+ parents and parents with 2SLGBTQIA+ children. You can find more information about the organization and contact them through their website <https://pflagcanada.ca/> or find them on social media @pflagcanada.

HIV/AIDS Resources and Community Health (ARCH)

The HIV/AIDS Resources and Community Health offers modified and virtual programming. ARCH Guelph, along with its partners, assists lesbian, gay, bisexual, and

transgender youth in Guelph and Wellington County. ARCH focus solely on education and prevention of the spread of HIV and Aids. ARCH supports the community by providing workshops to empower youth and spread education and awareness. Other essential services they offer include safe needle disposal, training for providing overdose medication and syringe distribution. To learn more about ARCH, visit their website <https://archguelph.ca/> or find them on social at @archguelph.

Joining groups or attending 2SLGBTQ+ events and workshops is a great way to connect in the community or become more educated about how to support friends and loved ones. To learn more about the events and services we offer at the rainbow coalition waterloo region, visit our website <https://yourwrrc.ca/> or follow us on social media @WRRRC.Info.

Understanding Intersectionality In The 2SLGBTQIA+ Community

Intersectionality is a theory that has been around for over 30 years and helps explain the different forms of oppression that individuals or groups face in society.

What is Intersectionality?

The theory of intersectionality explains how a single individual can belong to two or more marginalized groups at a time. The term originated in 1989 when Kimberlé Crenshaw, a law professor at Columbia and UCLA, developed the definition and continues to campaign for recognizing how intersectionality affects various marginalized groups today. Intersectionality explores how some members of an oppressed group can experience further oppression or discrimination than others. This occurs due to the various overlapping social identities that we experience in society. These identities can include race, gender, sexuality, and class. A primary example of the prominence of intersectionality in our society is the wage gap, where women are only paid 78 cents on the dollar compared to men. Women face the disadvantage of being paid less than men, but this gap is not equal for all women. Indigenous women face further oppression, only being paid 58 cents on the dollar.

What intersectionality Means in the 2SLGBTQIA+ Community

Intersectionality demonstrates the unique ways people can belong to more than one oppressed social group. This issue can be present in all groups, including the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Intersectionality is especially present at pride events that require entrance fees or other additional costs. Events like these are not accessible to all community members who are racialized or do not have the available funds. In these circumstances, many members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ may be unintentionally excluded from these events or opportunities. Individuals who experience intersectionality and multiple forms of oppression face further challenges than other members of society or a specific group. Their experiences will be unique since intersectionality is not another form of oppression but a different form.

The challenges that individuals have because of intersectionality and other forms of oppression can be mentally and physically taxing on a person. Therefore, we must recognize that all anti-oppression work should be done with a strong understanding of intersectionality and the additional challenges it imposes on individuals. This will ensure that those who face the most marginalization and oppression in our society are not left out of vital movements that move our society forward. To find more free resources for 2SLGBTQIA+ consulting and events, visit our other blog, 'The Best Places to Connect with The Pride Community in the Kitchener Waterloo Region Today,' for more information. (link to blog)