

Bridging Diversity

Greetings from our Diversity Coordinator

Defining Diversity

Diversity is commonly understood in terms of dimensions that include but are not limited to race, age, place of origin, religion, ancestry, Aboriginal status, skin colour, citizenship, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, disability/ability, marital, parental or family status, same-sex partnership status, creed, language, educational background, literacy level, geographic location, income level, cultural tradition and work experience.

Source: Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition

It's only been one month since I joined Community Living Toronto as Diversity Specialist, yet it already feels like home. And not just because of a sense of familiarity that comes from previous work in the community support sector, but because the people I have met thus far have made me feel very welcome and have given me a sense of belonging. Whether it was a welcoming e-mail, a smile in the hallway, or an invitation to join the Zumba class, I have felt included. And, I find, it is that feeling of inclusion that really stays with you and shapes your experience. It then seems fitting for the first 2014 issues of Bridging Diversity to feature a story about what I call "inclusion in action," especially since February is National Inclusive Education Month.

So in the spirit of community-building, I invite you to visit my little diversity resource nook on the 2nd floor



of our Spadina Road office. There you can find a variety of resources and materials, from human rights definitions to group activities and even a couple of very cool children's books on diversity.

I hope to be a helpful, accessible resource to you in the vital work that you do, because when it comes to creating inclusive communities, we are truly all in this together!

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The road to Dan Leckie – Krista and Marissa's story

By Jelena Dangubic

What does true community inclusion mean to you? To Marissa Blake and Krista Lee Bath, it meant moving into their first apartment – together!

When Marissa and Krista learned that they were going to move into their own apartment on Dan Leckie Way with Community Living Toronto last spring, they were thrilled for the opportunity for increased independence and personal growth. But they were also a little

apprehensive because they didn't know each other. They had the opportunity to meet once before moving in which helped break the ice, but they each described the idea of living with someone they barely knew as "weird." Both women had previously lived in small town group homes and were open about the limitations they had experienced there, such as having a 9 PM curfew and not being involved in the menu planning or budgeting.

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For those who previously haven't met Marissa and Krista, they are two very different people. Marissa is a serious planner who often keeps a close eye on things that need to be done around the apartment like the grocery list and the laundry. Krista is spontaneous and laid back, but when necessary she will jump in to get things done. It took time for the two to get accustomed to each other's differences, but gradually they have learned to work with each other to accomplish things.

Since moving to Dan Leckie, Marissa and Krista have been keeping busy, not just around their apartment but also out in the community. They have been booking Wheel-Trans and using TTC on their own and attending various Community Living programs such as Community Junction and Foster Connections. The women have also pursued their individual hobbies and have traveled. Krista has joined a hockey league and visited her old group home in Peterborough, while Marissa joined a sailing program and attended her sister's wedding in Brantford. At Christmas, the two hosted an open house and spent hours at the mall, shopping for their families and friends. They have made a lot of new friends and say they hope to meet more



in the future.

Living on their own, Krista and Marissa were able to more fully experience Toronto's diversity while learning about each other's cultures. One of the highlights was watching the Caribbean Carnival parade from the front row, surrounded by the dazzling floats and costumes. For Marissa it was a chance to feel a connection to her family's Caribbean roots.

Marissa and Krista have accomplished a major milestone over the last year. They have overcome obstacles and have learned to collaborate, creating opportunities for personal growth. As they move into their second year of living together, the two women who were strangers a year ago and are now like sisters, continue to learn from each other and build memories that will last a lifetime.

Multifaith observances

- Jan 31 - Lunar New Year celebrated by the Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese communities.
- Feb 14 - St. Valentine's Day
- Feb 15 - Nirvana Day, Buddhist
- Feb 28 - Maha Shivaratri, Hindu festival

News | Events | Resources

CL Toronto is Celebrating National Inclusive Education Month by organizing a *spinclusion* "blitz" for the month of February. With over 20 schools participating and more than 1,000 students playing *spinclusion*, we are truly spreading the message of building inclusive communities!

February is Black History Month!

Explore and celebrate the heritage, traditions and culture of African-Canadians through numerous events taking place around the city! For event listings visit: www.toronto.ca/blackhistory

Pink Triangle Day - Most people know this day as Valentine's Day. But did you know that **February 14** is also Pink Triangle Day? Declared in 1979 to mark the first major legal victory for Canada's gay rights movement, this day brings attention to challenging homophobia and promoting inclusion for all sexual orientations and gender identities.

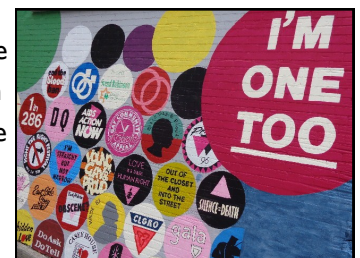


Photo: A mural celebrating LGBTQ communities, at Church and Wellesley.

THIS NEWSLETTER AND OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE ON SHAREPOINT