

MAY 16, 2013 - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NOVA SCOTIA RAINBOW ACTION PROJECT - Community Rallies Against Homophobia and Transphobia

HALIFAX - Members and allies of Halifax's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community gathered today to take action against homophobia and transphobia at a rally held by the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project (NSRAP) in recognition of International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHoT). The rally was supported by several local organizations.

"In the past few months, we have seen a number of steps in the right direction, but there is still much to be done." said Lisa Buchanan, vice-chair of NSRAP. "Members of our community continue to face inequality, particularly those who identify as transgender or transsexual."

Held annually since 2006, the rally at Grand Parade featured speeches from local activists and performers, including Lucas Thorne-Humphrey, Gabe Saulnier, and Jessica Durling, a transgender high school student who made news last month when she faced suspension for using the girls' washroom at her school. Durling spoke about her experience and the need for change.

In December 2012, the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act was amended to include explicit protection from discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression. In spite of this change and growing public awareness, members of the LGBTQ community continue to face discrimination in their daily lives.

This year's rally focused on the intersection between health and rights, including calls for an end to the ban on blood donations from those deemed to be "men who have sex with men" and for MSI coverage of sex reassignment surgery.

Kate Shewan is a trans rights activist who spoke at the provincial government's announcement of the changes to the Human Rights Act.

"Despite the amendment to protect trans people from discrimination, medically necessary surgeries are still not covered under the public health care system, specifically because they relate to a person's gender transition," Shewan said. "It is time to end this discrimination and provide trans people with access to medically necessary procedures."

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The International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia is celebrated annually on May 17. This date marks the anniversary of the day that homosexuality was removed from the International Classification of Diseases of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Today's rally was organized by the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project (NSRAP), the Youth Project, ElderBerries, prideHealth, Amnesty International, Transition House Association of Nova Scotia, the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia, the Canadian Federation of Student-Nova Scotia, and community volunteers.

For more information on NSRAP, an organization serving and advocating for the LGBTQ community in Nova Scotia, please visit <http://www.nsrp.ca>.

For more information on IDAHoT, please visit <http://www.dayagainsthomophobia.org>.

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FOR BROADCAST USE

Today at Grand Parade, members and allies of Halifax's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community gathered to take action against homophobia and transphobia. It was all part of the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia. The day marks the anniversary of homosexuality being removed from the International Classification of Diseases of the World Health Organization.

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Lisa Buchanan, vice-chair of the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project, said, "Members of our community continue to face inequality, particularly those who identify as transgender or transsexual."

Held annually since 2006, the rally at Grand Parade featured speeches from local activists and community members. The theme this year was health. Speakers addressed the blood donation ban for men who have sex with men, and called for MSI coverage of sex reassignment surgery.

Two local transgender activists also spoke: Kate Shewan, who spoke at the provincial government's announcement of changes to the Human Rights Act, and Jessica Durling, a transgender teen who was suspended from her high school for using the girls' washroom. The women spoke to the need for change, for better acceptance and treatment of transgender people.

More events will be happening tomorrow across the province, including in Wolfville and New Glasgow, with an event in Sydney on Sunday.

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