



2012-2013 Media Review

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Introduction

Submitted by Lisa Buchanan, Vice-Chair

NSRAP is often called on by media outlets to speak about current events and issues related to the LGBTQ community. The annual Media Review is designed to compile print and online media coverage which references NSRAP directly or is otherwise of importance to the LGBTQ community.

This review does not an exhaustive record. Where multiple news outlets covered the same story, only a a few selections are included. Articles are presented in chronological order.

NSRAP received particularly extensive media coverage in November when the provincial government amended the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act to include explicit protection from discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression, and more recently when the Minister of Health and Wellness reversed his initial decision and made a policy change that will result in public funding for surgeries related to gender transition.

June 2012

Rainbow flag hoisted for Halifax Pride Week

The Chronicle Herald, 2012-06-29

By David Jackson | Provincial Reporter

The rainbow flag was aloft at Province House on Thursday in the run-up to celebrations marking the 25th anniversary of Halifax Pride Week.

Premier Darrell Dexter, who helped raise the flag, said this year's events take on more significance in the wake of Ray Taavel's death in April. The well-known gay activist and past organizer of Pride Week was beaten outside a gay bar after trying to break up a fight.

Dexter said the response to the tragic loss of Taavel showed how much people's attitudes have changed in 25 years, pointing to the great outpouring of emotion in Halifax and elsewhere.

"The show of solidarity among so many people that were coalesced around that event, I think has to be a cause of real hope for the continuing cause of diversity and understanding in our province," he said.

Andre Denny has been charged with second-degree murder in Taavel's death. Denny was a patient at the East Coast Forensic Hospital in Dartmouth and had failed to return from a one-hour unescorted pass when the beating happened.

He was in court last week and a 60-day extension to his psychiatric assessment was granted.

Dexter said he is concerned about the length of time the assessment is taking.

"You want to see these things done in an expedient and understandable fashion, not just for all of those who were so drastically affected by Ray's death but for the individual as well and for the cause of the system of justice," the premier said.

Progressive Conservative Leader Jamie Baillie again questioned why a government review of the circumstances around Denny's unescorted pass isn't yet finished.

"It's well overdue," Baillie said. "It's an important matter, both of public safety for patients in our health-care system and for the general public.

"It also is a horrible crime that bothered very many Nova Scotians who value a province that stands for diversity."

The rainbow flag at Province House is to stay up for the month of July. Pride Week runs July 20-29.

July 2012

LOWE: We might just ask hir what ze prefers

The Chronicle Herald, 2012-07-06

By Lezlie Lowe

Jake Feldman isn't speaking the English most of us know.

"I met up with my friend and ze was so excited about what happened last night. Ze was saying it was one of the best nights of hir life."

If Feldman gets his druthers, more folks will use gender-neutral pronouns like "ze," "hir" and singular "they" in everyday speech.

"You never know the pronoun someone prefers unless you ask them," the upbeat 23-year-old says, between swigs from a water bottle.

"I don't know what pronoun you prefer. You don't know what pronoun I prefer. Only after we ask each other will we know. For some people, it's not 'he' or 'she.' It's 'they,' it's 'ze,' it's a whole lot of different things people have created to better reflect their lived realities."

Personally, Feldman prefers "he," which is nice and simple. For the record, I'll take "she." We agree we'd both answer to the singular "they."

After all, it's common enough in spoken English. Like: "Someone's on the phone for you and they say it's urgent."

And it's not like "they" never existed as a written alternative. It just fell out of use.

"He" has acted as a not-so-gender-neutral gender-neutral stand-in. Other alternatives — "han," "shey," "one," look online, there are dozens — have never clicked.

I blame word nerds. Present company included.

"You have to figure out what grammar is used for," says Feldman. "Maybe grammar is used to, as adequately as possible, represent ideas.

"Where do commas go? They go where they go to best represent meaning. So maybe what's actually grammatically correct is using 'they.'"

The real issue comes down to understanding that genitals don't always match up with genders. A person can have a penis and nevertheless identify as female because gender is the way a person feels, not how someone looks.

There's more to gender than the he/she solitudes.

"Not everyone fits into those categories," says Feldman.

"(A) person might not be a he or a she. And that's OK. That's not scary. That's totally fine. You know what I mean?"

But why modify the set grammar rules of an entire language to avoid mis-pronouncing (yup, that's the verb, and I'm using it) a relative few?

Well, besides illustrating an utter lack of acceptance of the way people experience their own identities, not to mention a dearth of creative thinking about the bounds of gender, there is the small matter of oppression.

Think of it like this: You're a woman. You feel like a woman. You know you're a woman. You wake up as a woman and go to bed as one.

But at every restaurant, at every government office, every Walmart and farm market, you get "sir." The why is irrelevant. The what isn't that mis-pronouncing is a repeated reinforcement that what you feel doesn't matter. You don't exist.

"People can decide that they don't want to (go gender-neutral) and probably live the rest of their lives just fine," Feldman says.

"But, ultimately, when people become aware that there's a group of people who are hurting, and that it's actually within their capacity to change the way they act to alleviate that, people should take advantage of that opportunity."

There's a simpler reason, too.

People can write: "Someone's on the phone for you and they say it's urgent" — and be understood perfectly well.

"That will include everybody," Feldman says. "That's possible. And not that hard. And if it's possible and not that hard, then there's no reason they shouldn't."

NSRAP's latest board of directors announced

Xtra, 2012-07-06

By Simon Thibault

On June 23, the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project's AGM took place and a new board of directors was put into place.

The list includes:

- * Kevin Kindred (chair)
- * Rosie Porter (vice-chair)
- * Matt Numer (past chair)
- * Kate Shewan (treasurer)
- * Nathaniel Lewis (secretary)
- * John Britton (member-at-large)
- * Jim Gouthro
- * Andrew Jantzen
- * Kate Keough
- * Justin Leblanc
- * Brenda Merritt
- * Alana Murray
- * Rebecca Rose
- * Nathaniel Smith
- * Lucas Thorne-Humphrey

NSRAP also held a community forum during the AGM and published topics of discussion at the meeting, as well as their annual report.

Speaking of NSRAP, they're still accepting applications for the Community Hero Awards, a topic discussed in Down East a few weeks ago.

Gender neutral bathroom signs causing confusion

CTV Atlantic, 2012-0713

Going to a public washroom is usually a no-brainer for most, but for people who are transgendered, it is not quite as straightforward.

Capital Health has introduced a new gender neutral sign in an attempt to be inclusive, but instead it is creating confusion. The signs have been out for a month and have created a lot of discussion.

“Ridiculous, not very obvious,” says one Halifax resident.

After community consultation, with input from transgendered individuals, Capital Health introduced a symbol to include people who identify as transgendered.

“When an issue is brought up from our community members at large, we want to do something to address that so this was the first step in helping to address that,” says Capital Health clinical nurse specialist Anita Keeping.

However, the message might be spinning in the wrong direction. Saint Mary’s Film and Media Assistant professor Jennifer Vanderburge appreciates the intent, but believes it is off the mark.

“In an effort to break down the opposition between male and female gender, what they’re doing is reinforcing that binary,” says Vanderburge.

She says icons should be immediately recognizable for clarity.

Kevin Kindred works with the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project. Their mission is to seek equality for people of all gender identities.

“Being in the bathroom where you’re perceived to be the wrong gender creates a security problem and transgender people say that’s an issue. So creating washrooms that are gender neutral are great,” says Kindred.

More of these signs could be popping up soon. Capital Health officials say the IWK could be getting more of them in the near future.

LOWE: Queer teaching not just about the sex thing

The Chronicle Herald, 2012-07-13

By Lezlie Lowe

Terrah Keener’s got a halting idea for all the teachers using summer to prep for the upcoming academic year — start teaching more queerly.

“Queer,” Keener admits, “is a word that makes you kind of stop.”

Stop and think, actually.

Keener, a Halifax mother of two, has been researching and writing about queer teaching to complete her doctorate in education from the University of South Australia.

Queer teaching isn’t about sex. It’s about class, race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality.

“It’s (about) opening up and looking at things differently. It’s about making sure we aren’t just saying, ‘Oh, we’re open to everybody.’ It’s about making sure our curriculum is really inclusive, the activities we do in the school, the language we use.

“It’s not just, ‘OK, here’s our unit on race and here is our unit on sexuality.’ It’s about looking at what books our kids are bringing home and asking who’s represented in these books and who’s not being heard.”

The germ for Keener’s research first sprouted when her now 11-year-old was born. Keener and her lesbian friends were all wondering what school would be like for their kids.

Would they be ostracized? Accepted? Would their experiences as the kids of queer parents be celebrated? Or erased?

Keener started looking into it.

“When you would read articles, or see anything, it was mostly from the perspective of the teachers. And it was, ‘Oh, we do this, this and this; it’s very inclusive.’ And, I thought, no one is asking the parents and no one is asking the kids.”

So that’s what Keener did. She sought out lesbian, gay and transgendered interview subjects — any parent identifying as non-heterosexual.

“What I found,” Keener says, “was that parents would start out saying, ‘We are so lucky, we are having a really good experience.’ No one I met had ever been targeted with violence. And because no one had been targeted, and they had been treated nicely, it was interpreted as acceptance.”

But that acceptance, Keener discovered, didn’t go so deep.

Sure, there were always two cards sent home for Mother’s Day, Keener says by way of example from her own experience, but there was “no queer content anywhere in the curriculum.”

The kids told a different, darker story.

“(Students) who identify as non-heterosexual are getting beat up and ostracized, and teachers aren’t doing anything about it,” Keener says.

Homophobic language runs rampant and no one is checking it, she says.

“It’s not any better than when I taught 20 years ago,” Keener says. “I was horrified to hear it hasn’t changed, (hearing) ‘that’s so gay, you fag, you faggot.’”

Keener says some teachers truly welcome queer-parented students, and likewise celebrate the experiences of students from, say, different ethnicities. But there’s no comprehensive push inside the system to do more than pay lip service to the experiences of non-majority families.

That’s what the idea of teaching queerly aims at.

“It’s about always bringing people’s experiences into the classroom. And not just, ‘Ok, you sit and talk to us about what it’s like to be Dutch.’ It’s really taking the kids’ experience and making sure it’s seen in the curriculum and not just once a year.”

But why, you might be wondering, should straight and straight-parented, white, middle-class kids be taught queerly?

“They need to understand that their experience in life is different than other people’s,” says Keener. “And that’s nothing to be afraid of. There isn’t one status quo and everything is other to them.”

They need to be taught queerly, Keener says, because they exist as part of a larger world.

Some Capital Health bathroom stalls get transgender symbol

The Chronicle Herald, 2012-07-16

By Kelly Shiers | Staff Reporter

The familiar stick figures remain, so as not to confuse anyone used to looking for them to point the way to a washroom.

But now Capital Health has added a third figure to the signs on some of its single-stall bathrooms in Halifax to represent transgender people, in a move designed to signal a welcoming environment to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals.

While the combination male-female symbol isn't getting universal raves, the move to provide gender-neutral washrooms has been welcomed, says the co-ordinator of Capital Health's prideHealth program. The signs came after the issue was raised more than a year ago during public consultation.

"Ideally, we would have just (an image of a) toilet which seems like a simple fit. But that doesn't exist as a universal sign, as something people across the world will be able to recognize as a bathroom," says Cybelle Reiber.

She said using words wouldn't work because of literacy and language issues. Capital Health also didn't want to confuse anyone with a completely different sign.

"We recognize we don't want to alienate people and we don't want to create a situation where people don't recognize where the bathroom is," Reiber said.

Reiber said the combination symbol is used by other organizations, including McGill University.

She said reaction is mixed.

"We consulted with the trans community here ... contacted a number of organizations to talk to them about what seems to be the best symbol. The consensus was we 'don't have a perfect answer,'" she said.

Still, there is progress.

"Before we didn't have any signage anywhere that recognized people may not fit the gender norms. It's a way of ... showing there's an openness, that (all) people are welcome here."

Reiber said the three-figure signs eventually will be used on all single-stall washrooms across Capital Health.

Men angry over fake engagement announcement prank

CTV Atlantic, 2012-07-17

Imagine opening your morning newspaper and seeing a piece announcing your engagement; only, you aren't getting married.

That happened to two men this week after someone submitted their photo to a Nova Scotia newspaper as a prank. But the pair doesn't find it funny.

The men featured in the engagement announcement are portrayed as a same-sex couple. However, not only are the men not gay, they didn't know anything about the announcement being put in the paper.

Bobby Cooper is one of the men featured in the announcement and he says he wasn't involved in putting the announcement in the paper, and neither was his friend – the second man in the photo.

"The announcement was placed as a poorly thought out prank from a friend that I feel should not have been approved by the staff at The Chronicle Herald without checking with one of us first," says Cooper in a statement. "I am a strong proponent of equal marriage rights for the LGBT community, and hate having my name involved in a prank that could possibly be perceived as making a mockery of something that the community had to fight towards for so long in Canada."

The announcement is very detailed, saying the "couple" has been together for five years and even lists their parents and where they went to school.

Cooper isn't the only one upset by the prank.

"I think it's stupid. I think it's childish. I think it's lame," says Halifax Pride spokesperson Neville MacKay.

"It sort of trivializes the important work that's been done for same-sex couples and makes a joke out of it," says Kevin Kindred of the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project. "I don't think the community really takes very kindly to that."

CTV News called The Chronicle Herald to ask how it checks the accuracy of such announcements, but phone calls were not returned.

"The LGBT community is not humourless but when people want to play pranks and stuff, if they can just think through what the implications are," says Kindred. "This clearly is not good for the guys involved. It's not good for the gay community. It's not good for anyone and it's just really juvenile and unfortunate."

Halifax Pride: Learn it and learn it well!

Xtra, 2012-07-17

By Simon Thibault

Pride in Halifax isn't just a bunch of parties, although those are rather fun. It also includes public presentations, lectures and discussions about queer identity, past, present and future. Here are a few you may want to check out.

prideHealth is putting on a series of lectures and presentations during Halifax Pride Week. Cybelle Rieber, from prideHealth, believes that Pride is a perfect time to "provide opportunities for learning and discussion about the state of healthcare for our community and the needs of the community. It is important to both Capital Health and the IWK to engage with the Pride community in a number of ways, and these sessions are really about building capacity."

The presentations include talks on such subjects as healthcare and queer women; the screening of a documentary called *Gen Silent*, about the issues that queer seniors face in long-term care; as well as a discussion of transgender issues and accessing healthcare. For more information, check out prideHealth's website.

NSRAP is also putting on its annual lecture series, called timeOUT. Topics range from the grassroots history of Pride in Halifax to the Canadian Charter of Rights And Freedoms' 30th anniversary.

"The lecture series is NSRAP's major contribution to the Pride events in Halifax," says NSRAP's Kevin Kindred. "We do it to make sure there's a good forum to learn more about the social and political issues of interest to the community -- we see Pride as a time for discussion and contemplation, as well as celebration. Every year we try to offer a variety, and this year is no exception. Our topics range from aboriginal issues, to healthcare, to the Charter, to the nature of Pride itself. We hope there's something there for everyone."

You can find out more by contacting NSRAP.

Nova Scotia newspaper prank announcing gay wedding angers targets, LGBT community

Yahoo! News, 2012-07-19

By Jordana Divon | Daily Brew

When Bobby Cooper opened the paper this week, he expected to read the news.

Instead, the Nova Scotia man discovered he had become the news after he and friend Russell Rogers were targeted in an elaborate prank.

As CTV News reports, a friend of the pair placed an engagement announcement in the *Chronicle Herald* that featured a photo of the two men above a heading that read, "Cooper — Rogers Engagement".

The blurb, which appeared alongside other nuptial announcements, described their "committed relationship of five years" and included their schools and their parents' names.

"Bobby and Russell met at a Montreal Canadiens game and have been the source of many happy moments in all of their friend's lives," it read. "The very proud parents could not be happier about the upcoming union."

The only hiccup is that Cooper and Rogers aren't in a relationship.

In fact, the men aren't even gay, and the entire incident has angered more than just the intended targets.

Speaking to *CTV Atlantic*, Kevin Kindred of the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project said the move "trivializes" all the work being done for same-sex couples.

"This clearly is not good for the guys involved. It's not good for the gay community. It's not good for anyone and it's just really juvenile and unfortunate," he said.

Cooper agreed, stating that the prank shot beyond poor taste and waded into harmful territory.

"I am a strong proponent of equal marriage rights for the LGBT community, and hate having my name involved in a prank that could possibly be perceived as making a mockery of something that the community had to fight towards for so long in Canada," he said in a statement.

Cooper also singled out the *Chronicle Herald* for failing to do their research before sending the paper off to the press.

While the nature of this particular prank may be more controversial, it certainly isn't the first time newspapers have behaved as a medium for mockery.

Last year businessman Basim Mansour spent \$3000 on an April Fool's Day ad in *The Virginian-Pilot* announcing he'd purchased the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel for \$659 million.

The trouble with today's media-based pranks, however, is that they live on the Internet forever.

OpenFile notes that before CTV got wind of the story, a screen grab had already gone viral on Facebook and Twitter.

So even if the jokes are meant in the spirit of a solid chuckle, pranksters should think twice before attaching their friends' names to something that will pop up in every future search engine query.

A new voice for an under-represented business community

Halifax Magazine, 2012-07-20

By Paula Bugden

Sitting in a conference room in downtown Halifax with two fellow board members, Jules Chamberlain has a welcoming smile on his face and looks eager to talk about InterQ: LGBT Chamber + Commerce Atlantic. Even though it's only been four months, the new organization is already stirring interest.

The group kicked off with two successful meet-and-greet events. Fifty-six people attended the first one in March. Their most recent, called interQintermix was on July 5 and drew about 60. "Right from the get-go we're getting support and recognition," says Chamberlain.

An interim board for now and based in Halifax, InterQ focuses on creating business opportunities and networking, among other areas, within the LGBT community. As Chamberlain says, the ultimate goal is to "foster, support and encourage." That includes gay business owners and employees, plus gay-friendly businesses and entrepreneurs.

The group's mandate also states a focus on "community development organization, promoting the rich diversity of LGBT Atlantic business, cultural and service communities."

With nine board members and biweekly meetings from the beginning, the organization has been busy drafting bylaws, organizing committees and membership details. Justin Mury, a fellow InterQ board member and mortgage broker, says the plan is to make it official by this fall. They already have subcommittees in place for membership and communications, finance and sponsorship.

"We're still in the growing stages...we're learning again how to grow things from the very beginning to make it larger," says Michelle Clare, InterQ board member and bank manager at RBC Royal Bank.

The idea stemmed from a breakfast business club in Halifax several months ago. Chamberlain, a realtor by profession, has aimed to play an active role since moving here from New Brunswick three years ago.

"Anywhere I've ever been I've always sought to foster community. And being a business person and an entrepreneur, it seems like a natural thing to do," says Chamberlain. Though there are many businesses within the LGBT community to consider, he says they're not always easy to spot. That's where InterQ comes in. "We can put a lot of people in connection with one another," says Clare. "And the sharing of information; I've learned a lot about different businesses that I didn't even know existed."

Jessica Tasker first heard about plans for InterQ at the business breakfast club in February. Since then, she's been looking forward to becoming an official member. Still in the early stages of building a business from the ground up, the 27-year-old former carpenter turned lead furniture designer is the owner of Trunk Studio, mixing Danish and Canadian modern styles for each piece.

With a plan to make an official launch in November, Tasker's main goal is to begin selling her custom-designed furniture via her e-commerce website this October. As a new entrepreneur she's already noticing the advantages of InterQ. "It's kind of like being on a sports team where you have a group of instant friends – and an instant support network," she says, comparing it to traditional networking events that take longer to make connections. "You have to nurture those relationships a lot more... it just takes a little more work and research."

Another benefit of InterQ, she adds, is the ability to generate sales through those connections and helping other businesses do the same. "There was really no support network for actual businesses or entrepreneurs in the LGBT community," says Mury.

For Krista Davis, special projects manager for the first annual OUTeast Queer Film Festival held last month, being invited to the InterQ meet and greet in March was an opportunity to mingle with potential sponsors. It was there she met Clare and, through that connection, gained RBC Royal Bank as the presenting sponsor for the festival.

Even though the festival is a non-profit event and not directly business-related, Davis says that meeting helped grow the audience and spread the word. OUTeast also received funding from the provincial government and other sponsors.

While networking is playing an important role, including social media updates via Facebook and Twitter, along with a mailing list of 160, Chamberlain says it's not the only focus. Membership and sponsorship packages, along with membership fees, insurance, upcoming plans for workshops and business seminars are also at the forefront of what InterQ will offer members.

Other provinces have also formed their own LGBT chambers of commerce, including Manitoba, Ontario and Québec. On a national level, the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce has been around since 2003.

Though InterQ does have an affiliation with the latter, Chamberlain explains how it will differ. "We're not trying to bring in a product from elsewhere," he says. "This isn't a sort of Canadian model...that we're trying to sell people on. Rather, we're opening up the door for us to create it. Then it will reflect us."

InterQ will have a booth during Halifax's Pride Week celebrations this year for anyone interested in learning more. And with the annual event kicking off on July 20, it seems fitting that InterQ is already on a roll.

Divas down Dykes in annual Halifax Pride softball game

Metro, 2012-07-22

By Alex Boutilier

Despite virtually no defence to speak of, the Divas defeated their rival Dykes in the annual softball game in the opening weekend of Halifax Pride.

It was all Divas at the start of the game, their first batter hitting a lead-off single on the first pitch of the game. The momentum was broken when it was revealed the Divas were actually short one player.

Conveniently, a man in a bright pink bikini – "Boots" – was watching from the stands and volunteered, smacking a triple on his first at bat.

"Hit it like you would the Boy Scouts of America," quipped one of the MCs.

The Dykes were quick to answer, and came to realize the Divas' principle weakness: hitting the ball in their general direction. Even though their rivals fielded between six and eight players in the outfield, the Dykes still managed to find a gap.

But the Divas had strengths, too – a makeup station to distract runners on second base, as well as actually physically preventing the Dykes from running the bases.

In the end, that, along with some impressive base running in heels, was enough to carry the day. The final score was 12-8 – although there was a great deal of confusion about which runs counted and which did not.

This is the 25th anniversary of Halifax Pride, and the softball game was just the start. After raising the flag raising in Grand Parade Monday night, organizers have planned everything from a gay pride trivia night to pool tournaments to harbour cruises.

The Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project will also be hosting a number of lectures at the Spring Garden Road Library, covering anything from LGBTQ health care to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

For a full list of Halifax Pride events – and there are many – head to halifaxpride.com.

Seniors homes can be intimidating for gay residents, filmmaker says

The Chronicle Herald, 2012-07-24

By John McPhee | Health Reporter

'Affirming' 7-storey apartment complex planned for Halifax 'a change' for better

As a gay man, Stu Maddux would like to be able to turn to older, perhaps wiser, people who have had similar life experiences.

But he's discovered that role models in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community aren't easy to find.

"As I looked into it, I realized it's not that they weren't out there, it's that they were kind of hidden," Maddux said in a phone interview from San Francisco on Monday. "And I wanted to look into that. Why are the people who are important to me and my life not there?"

As a journalist and filmmaker, the 46-year-old Alabama native put his skills to work in exploring this question. The resulting award-winning documentary, *Gen Silent*, tells the stories of those brave people who came out decades ago only to be forced back into the closet by discriminatory attitudes in places such as seniors homes.

The film will be screened at 7 p.m. tonight at the Royal Bank Theatre at the Halifax Infirmary as part of Capital Health's gay pride week activities.

"They've lived through a lot more than we have," Maddux said.

"They know what it's like to 'come out' and be institutionalized. It's hard for us to believe now but it was kind of the regular thing (as late as the 1970s) that your family could institutionalize you without your permission in the United States. You needed to get a certificate of mental health in order to be released and get employment."

While nothing as traumatic as that occurs these days, many still must endure insensitivity and negative reactions from caregivers and other seniors.

"They'll go in and try to read the Bible to these folks they know they're gay," Maddux said.

“They’ll say it’s not too late, let’s pray together. If you need that person to cook a decent meal for you, if you need that person for help, you’re just gonna shut up.”

The resulting silence referred to in the documentary’s title can have devastating results. Thousands of gay seniors die needlessly because they’re afraid to ask for help, he said.

But Maddux also found that support for GLBT seniors is beginning to build at the community level as people become more aware of their plight.

In Halifax, St. John’s United Church has had plans in the works for years to build a seniors apartment complex that would be the first “affirming” facility in Canada. The complex would be open to all, gay or straight, church board member Louisa Horne stressed in an interview Monday.

But specific policies on such things as sensitivity training, services and signage would be put in place.

“There are adjustments that are logical to make to demonstrate, and to actually walk the talk of being truly opening and welcoming to all,” Horne said.

The plan for the seven-storey facility, which would be built at the corner of Willow and Windsor streets, has yet to be approved by Halifax regional council. The church has been forced to downsize the project amid complaints from some neighbouring residents.

Those changes need to be considered by municipal planning staff before any recommendation is made to the Peninsula community council, city spokeswoman Shaune MacKinlay said Monday.

This council, made up of three regional councillors, will in turn make recommendations to the full council on whether to approve the project. Given the bureaucratic hurdles, Horne said it would be at least two years, likely more, before the complex could be built if it gets the green light.

Maddux is heartened by such projects and the work of organizations such as the Capital Health to create an accepting environment to the LGBT community.

“I’m confident it’s going to be change for the better if we don’t just assume it’s going to change,” he said. “We really have to work at it.”

Dalhousie Students Call for Transgender Equality in NS

Halifax Media Co-Op
by John Hutton

DalOUT and Dalhousie Student Union demand amendment to Human Rights Act

HALIFAX — DalOUT, the award winning LGBTQ society, is calling on the government to amend the Human Rights Act to include gender identity and gender orientation as prohibited grounds for discrimination. The student society is doing a series of actions to promote equal human rights for gender variant and transgendered students, and all Nova Scotians generally.

“Students who are transgender, gender-variant, intersex, or gender non-conforming face barriers in the form of discrimination. Legal protection from discrimination does not exist in areas such as employment, tenancy, access to services, or participating in volunteer organizations. In 2012, nobody should face discrimination just because of who they are,” says John Hutton, representative for the LGBTQ community on the Dalhousie Student Union.

DalOUT is encouraging the public to contact Ross Landry, the NS Minister of Justice, to call for legislation in the fall to amend the Human Rights Act. The society's website has been updated to include a pre-written email that people can send. DalOUT will be marching in the LGBTQ Pride Parade on Saturday, July 28th with the theme "Trans Rights are Human Rights."

"It's time for the NDP government to take concrete steps forward for equality for trans people. Ontario just passed legislation to prohibit discrimination based on gender identity and gender orientation with all-party support, and the federal NDP has been vocal on the issue federally," says Hutton. "The trans community expects support from the provincial government, and that means making legislative amendments to the Human Rights Act a priority."

The Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) is supporting the action and will be in attendance. The Union's council recently passed a motion to support DalOUT's call for change and will be marching in the parade with DalOUT.

"High tuition fees aren't the only barrier to accessible education," says Aaron Beale, External Vice President of the Dalhousie Student Union. "Students already struggle with high loads of debt. Having to face discrimination as well is unjust. The DSU is proud to be supporting the trans community in demanding equal rights for all."

Jones offers for mayor of Truro

The Chronicle Herald, 2012-07-26

TRURO — Voters will have a second choice for mayor when they cast their ballots later this year.

Keltie Jones announced Wednesday that she will challenge Bill Mills in the upcoming municipal election. Jones said she wants to help rebrand Truro and move it away from the perception some have that it's a difficult place for newcomers to fit in.

"That's not been my experience," she said. "I think we undersell ourselves and we need to have somebody out there as a leader who's going to create a real positive image of who we are."

Jones said she wants to help create a sustainable community that considers the environment, encourages local jobs and opportunities, and provides the opportunity for people to purchase what they need within the community.

The necessity for a transparent government that keeps its citizens aware of what's happening and when topics will be discussed is another issue Jones said she would campaign on.

Jones is academic vice-president for students at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College, a board member and treasurer for the Colchester Adult Learning Association, and president of the Truro District School Bands Auxiliary.

Originally from Bridgewater, Jones moved to Truro in 2009 after living for 25 years in California, where she attended university, worked, and served on various boards.

She and her wife, Joy, have two daughters, Diana and Joanne.

Transgender rights sought

The Chronicle Herald, 2012-07-27

By Lois Legge | Features Writer

Human rights act inclusion bid started

They're a small, misunderstood segment of the population.

But they face some of the biggest hurdles toward equality.

Getting a job.

Accessing the right health care.

Even walking safely down the street can be struggles for transgender people, a provincial activist group says.

So the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project is calling on the province to give them specific protection under the law. The non-profit group wants the government to add transgender people to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act.

And the group — which works on behalf of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people — will be pushing for that protection at today's 25th annual gay pride parade in Halifax, carrying placards and circulating a petition for the cause.

"It's clearly a way that the government can show leadership on the issue of equality for our community," Rainbow chairman Kevin Kindred said in an interview Friday, after issuing a news release calling for the change.

"I think most people understand that when you explain it to them. (But) the wheels of government move slowly so we decided that it was the right time to start telling the story to the public, as well about why this legislative change needs to be made."

Justice Minister Ross Landry said Friday he's "very sympathetic and understanding" to the group's concerns and is committed to bringing them forward to his government. But Landry, noting he's already met with the group and is actively studying the issue, stopped short of promising a change.

"My position is that we're trying to work through this issue so it's a matter of consulting with the health-care professionals and other government colleagues," he said in an interview.

"And I suspect, from where they're sitting, it's not moving fast enough and I respect that."

Landry was noncommittal about whether he wants the act changed.

"What I want is for everybody to be treated fairly and equitably. Whether that's the best method to do that, I haven't come to a conclusion there yet. And I don't want that in any way to make anyone feel negative about my position, it's just I have to do the consultation and dialogue further. It hasn't gone to the wayside for me."

But Kindred's group hopes today's efforts at least speed things up.

The parade, which started as a protest march and helped gain equal protection for gay Nova Scotians, is a perfect platform to seek support, he said.

Past protests helped pressure the government into adding sexual orientation and other categories to the act back in 1991. But, Kindred said, those descriptions don't fit the transgender community, which is often misunderstood.

Transgender individuals don't always have sex change operations, he said, but they do feel as though they are in the wrong body.

"Most people's gender identity aligns very well with their physical body and the way that they're perceived, and they never really experience any conflict in that. But there is a segment of society that experiences a discrepancy so their body may indicate female traits, society may look at them and physically think of them as female, but their strong sense of self identity might be male.

"So that's what we call transgender, anyone who feels a discrepancy between the gender that they're perceived to be and the gender that they feel is more accurate for them."

Even family doctors are often ill-informed about what transgender means, Kindred said, so people with gender identity issues can't always get the services they need. Local anecdotal evidence and some surveys in places like Ontario also show they face higher levels of employment and health services discrimination than other minorities.

And transgender people face physical harassment much more frequently than the general population, he said.

"I think what we learned from the struggle for equality for gays and lesbians is that legal reform and changing public opinion sort of go hand in hand."

The provinces of Ontario and Manitoba, along with the Northwest Territories, have legally protected transgender people. Landry said he'll look at those changes as part of the government's consideration of the issue.

"My position is that I believe in fairness and equity in society, and I firmly believe that all persons have a right to free association and free movement in society and a right to feel safe and secure in society, and part of my job is to make sure that that's occurring."

The Rainbow Action Project has already gathered several hundred signatures on its petition. It expects to collect many more at the parade, which in recent years has drawn up to 80,000 people.

It will present the petition to the provincial legislature in the fall.

Voice of the People | July 28

The Chronicle Herald, 2012-07-28

Equal treatment vital

A July 24 article referred to filmmaker Stu Maddux's concern about equal and dignified treatment of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender residents in long-term care facilities. I certainly agree that much work needs to be done.

A few years ago I contacted many facilities in Nova Scotia with important and relevant questions. Some facilities had policies in place and sent me copies. A few refused to take part in my survey, and I realized they do not provide proper protection from possible staff and other residents' discriminatory behaviour. We know that we are protected by law, but that does not mean we are automatically protected from abuse. Long-term care facilities that do have policies in place regarding LGBT seniors must also enforce them.

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Northwood Manor in Halifax, the largest seniors facility in the province, has publicly acknowledged its efforts to protect LGBT residents. Last year, it was presented with an award by the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project. I was fortunate to have had a part in conducting two workshops at Northwood and the reception by management and staff was tremendous.

As we continue to raise awareness, we must involve government and speak with facility management, staff and other residents, providing positive education. We like to believe Canadians are above abusive treatment in nursing homes. As a longtime gay-rights activist, I beg to differ. Equal treatment must be part of a long-term care facility.

Gerard Veldhoven, New Glasgow

Anti-height, not anti-gay

I am disappointed that The Chronicle Herald printed the July 24 article on the seven-storey apartment complex proposed for the St. John's United Church property on Windsor Street in Halifax, without seeking the viewpoint of church neighbours. From the article, readers might believe neighbours oppose the project because of its gay-inclusion aspects. Opposition to the project is based solely on the massive size of this development, which will be grotesquely out of scale with the neighbourhood. We would eagerly welcome a three- or four-storey development that was gay affirming.

What the article fails to point out is that the revenue generated from the proposed apartment and commercial complex will support a church building, to be built on the same site. Why not proceed with a smaller building more in scale with the neighbourhood? Because to do so will not provide the congregation with a new church building.

Will St. John's United continue to suggest that its neighbours, and other seniors housing complexes, are anti-gay in order to promote its drive to build an apartment and commercial complex far exceeding the area's existing R2 zoning, and incompatible with the city's Municipal Planning Strategy? This proposal is more about funding a congregation than providing housing for gay seniors.

August 2012

'Gaybourhood watch' launched in Halifax

The Chronicle Herald, 2012-08-17

By Laura Fraser | Staff Reporter

Jay Wells has seen friends beaten and has been a victim of violence himself in the wee hours of the morning.

Raymond Taavel died April 17 after he tried to break up a fight outside Menz bar on Gottingen Street and was fatally beaten.

And about a month later, one of the clients at Wells's salon was assaulted and taken to hospital.

"I've been in Halifax for more than 20 years and you hear about violence against gay men, and that's just a fact that we've come to accept," Wells said.

"But in the wake of a death, when something like this happens, it kind of gets you going."

For the Barrington Street businessman, that meant no longer accepting violence as a fact of life in his community, either the geographic one or those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.

The first step in that plan is to launch a "gaybourhood watch."

And he is hoping others in his neighbourhood will help fill in the gaps. One of his ideas mirrors that of the Block Parent Program — that homes and businesses with a sticker identify safe havens for anyone who feels threatened on the sidewalk.

"There's been discussion of people walking the beat," Wells said. "I don't know about that, that's pretty intense, putting yourself out there."

And despite the moniker, Wells said the group would not only be for people who identify as LGBT.

"It's not a gay thing, but I'm a gay man and I live in the gay community, and my friends are getting hurt over and over."

The chairman of the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project said that homophobic violence is not specific to Halifax, but has been a recurring problem.

"I think Raymond's death certainly highlighted the potential for violence that our community faces and really caused a lot of people to focus their attention on the issue," Kevin Kindred said.

"It's one of the ways of looking at positive things that can come out of a tragedy."

Kindred said he hopes Halifax Regional Police will be part of the discussion.

Const. Brian Palmeter, a force spokesman, said police have helped establish different Neighbourhood Watch groups across the municipality.

"We certainly encourage people and try to work with communities to look out for their own areas."

Wells is hosting the meeting at 6 p.m. on Aug. 27 at Jay Wells Salon.

NSRAP announces its list of heroes for 2012

Xtra, 2012-08-21

By Simon Thibault

The Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project announced its list of community heroes this afternoon.

First up is Karen Finnigan, who received the Reverend Darlene Young Community Hero Award. Finnigan is a social worker for the Cape Breton District Health Authority who has worked to create safer spaces for LGBTQ Cape Bretoners.

The second is Jesiah MacDonald, who received the Raymond Taavel Media Award. MacDonald became an accidental spokesperson for transgender rights when it was reported that he was being charged by MSI for a medically necessary hysterectomy, claiming that it was part of his transition process. MacDonald was quoted as saying, "Someone's got to talk about it because if I don't stand up and say this is what happened to me and this is why it was wrong, then what if it happens to somebody else?"

And last, but certainly not least, is prideHealth, the recipient of this year's Corporate Stewardship Award. A collaboration between Capital Health and the IWK, prideHealth has been doing a lot of work over the past year, from creating an It Gets Better video, to hosting discussions and forums and more.

Kudos and congrats to all the winners!

September 2012

Halifax man pepper-sprays teen over gay slurs

CBC News, 2012-09-11

A 39-year-old Halifax man says he used pepper spray on a teenager after she harassed his partner for six weeks.

"I actually pepper-sprayed her," said Christopher Whittle. Whittle spoke with the CBC's Elizabeth Chiu because he wants people to know this was not a random act.

The incident happened last Friday, when Halifax Regional Police said a 14-year-old girl was sprayed with an irritant near the parking lot of the Halifax Shopping Centre.

Police released an image of the suspect, and Whittle was arrested hours later.

Whittle said this was not a planned attack. But he said the girl has been taunting his boyfriend who works at the mall for weeks. Whittle said the slurs began when his partner wore beads from gay pride to work.

"This was happening every few days. She was coming and making comments about him being gay, and basically just taunting him for who he was, calling him a faggot, fruit whatever," Whittle said.

Friday, Whittle said he witnessed an incident between the girl and his partner. He said he snapped.

"After so much of this going on, and seeing how this affected him – someone you love being tortured in this way, it does something to you. It really does."

He said he went to his car and got the spray. He said he owned it for self-defense purposes.

Whittle said he was shocked to find out the person he sprayed was a 14-year-old girl. He said she looks older, and assumed she was a woman.

"I do regret how I handled it. I could have handled it differently. But at the time I guess I was just so upset with everything that had gone on, that's how I reacted."

Police say whatever the reason, there's no excuse to pepper spray anyone.

"They should take other means such as calling police, and allow us to deal with it so they don't find themselves in a position of being charged criminally," said Halifax Const. Brian Palmeter.

Whittle doesn't have a criminal record but he now faces four charges including assault with a weapon and possession of a dangerous weapon.

He's scheduled to appear in Provincial court on Oct. 30.

Whittle said he knows he could face jail time if convicted, but he had to take a stand.

"It's just sad that someone can come into your place of employment or wherever and harass you and turn your whole world upside down for ignorance, basically," said Whittle.

Pepper-spray motive sparks emotional reaction

CBC News, 2012-09-12

Christopher Whittle admitted to CBC he was behind incident with teen last week

A man's confession that he pepper-sprayed a teenage girl in Halifax has left the father of the victim reeling.

Christopher Whittle says he does not regret telling his story. (CBC)

Christopher Whittle told CBC News he went after the girl after she allegedly harassed his boyfriend at work for weeks.

Whittle alleged that the teenager repeatedly taunted his partner with gay slurs, and he finally snapped.

The girl's father replied to the story in an email.

"My daughter was completely devastated by Mr. Whittle's allegations," the man wrote, adding that she was "physically attacked without [a] chance to defend herself."

Whittle said he thought the girl was actually a woman. He added that he regretted the way he handled the situation.

Police immediately condemned Whittle's explanation, saying it is no excuse to pepper-spray someone.

Now, gay rights groups are also speaking out.

Kevin Kindred, a gay activist in Halifax, said the story shows homophobia is still out there and it's serious, but he added that Whittle's response was extreme.

"There's no circumstances in which it's acceptable to perpetuate violence against a harasser," he said.

"I'm just saying it's understandable to me how someone feels that pressure as a result of harassment and makes what ultimately is a bad and indefensible choice."

Jay Wells wants to start a Gaybourhood watch — a non-violent approach to gay-bashing. He said the pepper-spray case is part of trend he is seeing in the community.

"I notice people have a lot say and are standing up for themselves or want to stand up for themselves. So I stand by that. I want people to do that in a constructive, positive way," Wells said.

Whittle said he is glad he has told his story because people now know this was not a random incident.

He'll have to tell his story again before a judge when he faces criminal charges on Oct. 30.

Acadia investigates alleged harassment

The Chronicle Herald, 2012-09-21

By Gordon Delaney | Valley Bureau

WOLFVILLE — Officials at Acadia University are investigating an alleged homophobic incident in which a young woman was targeted for verbal abuse by a group of rowdy male students on campus.

Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project
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“We take this incident very seriously,” Acadia spokesman Scott Roberts said in an interview Thursday.

He was referring to an article written by an anonymous female student in the online edition of the Athenaeum, the student newspaper. The student, who does not want to be identified at this time, said she was verbally harassed by a group of about 20 male students while waiting in line for a recent concert in the Student Union Building.

The woman, who is openly gay, said she was taunted with homophobic slurs by the male students, who chanted insults in unison.

“This is a very tolerant and respectful community,” said Roberts. “So an incident like this deserves serious attention, and that’s what we’re giving it.”

Officials in the campus equity office, along with members of the Acadia Students’ Union, are conducting the investigation, which is focusing on interviewing the complainant and other students and witnesses in the vicinity at the time.

“It is going to take us some time to speak to everyone and to try to determine precisely what happened,” Roberts said.

The alleged incident doesn’t demonstrate the respect expected of all students and staff on campus, he said.

“We ensure that all of our incoming students understand our harassment and discrimination policy. We also do specific training with security and residence staff on how to intervene and the appropriate measures to take when they encounter any sort of inappropriate behaviour.”

Student union president Matthew Rios said the campus is shocked by the allegations in the article.

“It’s not a reflection of our university community; the campus here is defined by its community values,” Rios said in an interview at the Acadia campus Thursday.

“When you look at the makeup of our student population, I think you see a community that welcomes diversity.

“So in my opinion, this is an anomaly, but one that needs to be addressed.”

The real nature of the campus is being shown in some of the online comments, Rios said.

“Students are reaching out to this individual. That is more a reflection of what we are about here.”

If anything, the incident will provide an opportunity for more education and open discussion, he said.

Kevin Kindred, spokesman for the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project, said he’s been following the online discussion about the incident.

“It’s not something that shocks me exactly,” Kindred said in an interview from Halifax. “We know from our work that homophobic harassment can happen just about anywhere.

“The struggle against homophobic harassment and bullying will continue. The first step is acknowledging it and having people recognize that incidents like this continue to happen.”

October 2012

When a man is a woman

The Chronicle Herald, 2012-10-06

By Lois Legge | Features Writer

She knew she was a girl when she was a little boy.

But more than 50 years passed before Denise Holliday's body matched her mind.

And it took almost as long to quiet "the hell" that she says drives some to suicide or secrecy and despair.

Thoughts that nearly drove her crazy before she even understood what they meant.

Or before she faced the outward dis-crimination that can be even more severe than the occasional taunts or stares this former military man endures.

Insults, threats, assaults, isolation and ostracism are common in the lives of transgendered Nova Scotians, local ad-vocates say. It's something they hope to end by pushing for gender identity protection under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act.

"Trans people face discrimination and harassment at a level that is much higher than a lot of other disadvantaged and minority groups," says Kevin Kindred.

Kindred's non-profit group, the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project, is calling on the government to change the word-ing of the Human Rights Act to secure the right of transgendered people to lead "dignified lives."

The advocacy group is circulating a petition, so far with 1,500 signatures, that it plans to present to the legislature this fall. It calls for the specific inclusion of gender identity in the act, something Justice Minister Ross Landry said in an earlier interview the government is still pondering.

Words like transgendered, trans and gender identity weren't even in the ver-nacular when Denise was growing up as Dennis in working-class Eng-land.

"We were the unspeakables," the 65-year-old says, sitting in the Upper Musquodoboit home she shares with Sharon, her spouse of 42 years — the woman Denise married when she was still Dennis, before she had breasts and a vagina and the peace of mind it took half a cen-tury to find.

"Nobody wanted to recognize that we even existed."

She can't explain the nature of that existence.

"I thought there was something wrong with me. I had never heard of trans people," she s ays.

But this father of three — now legally a she —knew she was "different" a long, long time ago. When she skipped rope with girls instead of playing football with boys; when she tried on her sisters' clothes; when she loved working in a shoe warehouse because she could sneak on women's heels.

"I'd be happy for 10 seconds and be upset for weeks," she says today, surrounded by the family pictures that cover every living room cabinet and wall.

Her two daughters and one son (now dead). Her two grand-daughters. Her grandchildren's drawings.

"To Grammie and Gran," reads one over a crayoned sketch of a little brown dog.

Her calico cat calls to a chickadee at the window, spanning a stretch of weathered highway and houses.

"Queer corner," some locals call it, she says, because she lives in one house and a gay man lives in another, just up the road. Denise used to ride down another road in England almost six decades ago, on her bicycle with her own little dog in tow, to quiet the confusing thoughts that started when she was four.

"Off into the countryside and we'd ride for hours, and we'd walk through the woods and ride home again," she says.

"I spent more time doing that than anything else because that was the only time I felt at peace." Lasting peace has been a long time coming.

And while the world has changed a lot since her days in Sunderland, even now few transgendered men and women feel as comfortable as Denise does talking publicly about their lives.

She says she's lived most of hers. And she wants to help younger people accept who they are sooner. To prevent the kind of confusion and fear that followed her for decades, that led three people she knew to suicide. To end the discrimination, from landlords and employers and bystanders, and the higher-than-average level of street harassment and violence Kindred says they face.

"I know someone who was being harassed by a neighbour in their apartment building but didn't feel like she could talk to her landlord because she . . .

thought there was a risk she would get evicted," Kindred says.

"I spoke with a woman who, in her small community, was well-known under a male name and then transitioned and one of the stores that she frequented — and sort of had to because it's a small community and you don't have a lot of options as to where to go — refused to deal with her under her new legal name, refused to accept her new card in the new name," Kindred says.

"So that sort of thing. That's not acceptable treatment, that's discriminatory. It violates someone's basic human rights and dignity, but there needs to be a clear statement that that's discrimination under the act, and people who experience things like that can go to the human rights commission and have their problems dealt with."

Denise sometimes faces drive-by slurs and mocking laughter from strangers.

But people in the Musquodoboit area, where she's lived for more than 35 years, have been "good enough to leave us alone."

"Most of the people here have either been too polite to say too much or too wary," she says.

But others, she knows, continue to "struggle and struggle."

"It's a battle," she says.

Before suffering a minor stroke and brain block four years ago, Denise spoke regularly to Nova Scotia groups about gay and transgender issues and hosted her own radio show on Dalhousie University station CKDU.

She's slowly recovering her strength and her lost memory, mostly names.

But images of her own battles are as clear as her certainty, for as long as she can remember, that she was a girl inside a boy's body — a paradox that is the essence of being transgendered, whether or not individuals decide to physically switch genders.

"The first thing you know is your gender," she says, wearing a wig and women's clothing, something she started doing openly even before doctors removed her penis and testicles and created a vagina, almost 15 years ago. Before daily doses of estrogen helped grow her breasts and slow the appearance of facial hair.

"I always wanted to be female."

But just before her 18th birthday, she actually joined the British military to get away from them.

"Being around females was driving me crazy," she says, because she wanted so badly to be one.

She became a dog trainer in the Royal Army Veterinary Corps. Ironically, the military was where she would meet the woman who would become her wife, and later her "spouse" — a life partner who doesn't want to talk publicly about a relationship Denise knows defies society's norms and expectations.

Just as, Kindred notes, transgendered people defy entrenched ideas about gender and sexual orientation, two distinctly different things.

Denise, then still Dennis, married Sharon because he wanted to have children as much as he wanted to be a woman.

She revealed her secret three months into the marriage and doesn't remember any anger or recrimination from the woman who has stood by her in the face of such enormous changes.

"I don't think she fully understood, to be honest," Denise says. "She probably wouldn't remember half of what I told her. I know over the years, some-times we seem to speak at loggerheads. I'm speaking from one perspective, she's speaking from another and afterwards when we come back, I remember it from my perspective, she remembers it from her perspective."

"And I'm sure that goes on with everyone, but when it goes on between the average couple who are male and female, there are set kind of expectations and stuff there. When you get somebody like us, the set expectations aren't there anymore, they're gone. So my expectations are not the same as the regular husband's. . . . (The gender roles are) not that defined."

Neither is her sexuality. Denise doesn't call herself gay or straight. She says sex itself has never been a strong force in her life, as a man or woman, because "the gender thing was always the priority in my mind."

She hasn't been intimate with a man since she changed genders.

And "the love I have for (Sharon) is a love from one person to another. It's not sexual, it's not a sexual thing. It's deeper than that."

Their love for their children, pictured in various stages of their lives throughout the home, runs deep, too.

They agreed early on, even before their first child was born, that Denise wouldn't change genders until they were older.

They kept that promise until she started transitioning, when their youngest was 12 and their oldest, their son, was in his 20s.

Their girls, she says, have adjusted well. Their son did not. He left for Alberta and cut off all ties with his parents.

He died two years ago in a motorcycle accident. But Denise takes some solace in messages they later received from his friends — that he'd planned to visit them that summer, that perhaps he was starting to come around.

"Every trans person has a different story on this," Kindred says. "If I could generalize, I would say of the gays and lesbians that I talk to, especially youngsters, it's very rare to hear those stories now of families rejecting people.

"Of the transgendered people that I talk to, it's much more common.

"It's not everyone's story. I think there are some shining examples of how families can deal with this very well and can embrace their children or their family members who are going through a transition. But I think, unlike sexual orientation, that is sort of the exception for trans people and not the rule."

It's also undeniable, Kindred says, that the rate of suicides and attempted suicides is much higher among transgendered people.

"And that's not because being trans causes someone to be suicidal. It's that it's so difficult to come to terms with being trans in a society that has a very strict view of gender and sex.

"It's not inherent to being trans that you become depressed and suicidal, it's the fact that society can't find a place for trans people to have dignity and healthy lives, and that causes a cycle that can lead to depression and suicide."

But Kindred believes a legal change can be the match that sparks broader enlightenment.

He and others working for gay rights saw that happen after the province included sexual orientation in the Human Rights Act in 1991.

"The transgender community is just at the beginning of that process, of society figuring out who they are and starting to recognize that they have the right to live dignified lives," he says.

The government has to study the issue much more before deciding whether to amend the Human Rights Act, Landry told The Chronicle Herald this summer. He said he's met with representatives of Kindred's Rainbow Action group, which advocates for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people, and will consider the group's petition when it is brought forward.

Landry stressed that he's "very sympathetic and understanding" to the cause and believes strongly in equality for all. But he isn't sure the proposed legislative change is the answer.

Whether or not the Human Rights Act is modified, Denise says she'll continue trying to create understanding through the prism of her own life — a vast window on society's progression, however slowly, toward some semblance of acceptance.

And of her own journey from being an "unspeakable" to an open, unashamed champion of who she is and was always meant to be.

"Any opportunity I get to speak out . . . call me, I'll be there," Denise says. "It's not a problem for me.

"Why would I want to? Because these kids are changing gender earlier and earlier, and if I can help to pave the way for them, perhaps they'll have more of a life. I'm not saying I haven't. I had a pretty good life, but at the same time I had a pretty miserable life. "I don't know how to explain that. If you gave me the option to go back at 16 and change gender and live as a female, I'd

have to say no. Why? Because I had such a good life? No. But because I had some pretty wonderful kids, I've got some pretty fantastic grandkids, and by doing that, I would lose all that."

Today's young people are in the same boat when it comes to making such an important life decision, she says.

"But if they change, (they've) got a life.

"They'll have disappointments, like we all have disappointments, but they'll be who they are inside."

Nova Scotia activists tackle trans rights

Xtra, 2012-10-11

By Simon Thibault

Rainbow Action Project hopes lawmakers will emulate Ontario's Toby's Act

The Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project (NSRAP) is looking to push lawmakers to follow Ontario's lead and amend the province's Human Rights Act to include the terms "gender identity" and "gender expression."

Kevin Kindred, the chair of NSRAP, says Nova Scotia needs these changes to protect trans people from discrimination.

"The particular push in Nova Scotia came about because of the progress at the federal level, and within other provinces," he says.

On the national level, Bill C-279, also known as the trans rights bill, is slowly edging its way toward a third reading in Parliament. It is currently awaiting approval from the justice committee.

Meanwhile, Manitoba is looking to amend its Human Rights Code, and Ontario passed trans rights Bill 33 – also known as Toby's Act – in June. Kindred and NSRAP modelled the language of their petition to amend the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act on Toby's Act.

"There is political support for taking transphobia seriously and evolving human rights laws in the right way," Kindred says.

During summer Pride festivities, NSRAP volunteers collected more than 1,500 signatures in support of the changes. Kindred and other members of NSRAP have also been meeting with various members of the legislature to see where they stand on the issue. "The reason why we are building public support at the same time dealing with government in the major traditional lobbying way is that it's important for the government to know that this is a priority for us and for Nova Scotians who care for equality issues."

But the old adage that the wheels of justice are slow holds true, especially when bogged down by bureaucracy. "It's about making a convincing case to those who are influential," Kindred says. "Depending on how high a priority it is for the government, it can take some time."

Before becoming an NDP MP for Halifax and a big supporter of Bill C-279, Megan Leslie worked with NSRAP on trans rights. "In Nova Scotia there is an incredible openness to trans rights that I don't see in other provinces," she says. "When we talked to the commissioners with the human rights commission, we talked about the fact that transgender people are not covered by the Human Rights Act. They fit in the margins under gender, sexuality, et cetera.

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"They were open on the fact that they would find ways to fit trans people under the prohibited grounds when they can," she recalls. "But there was a recognition that it deserved its own listing."

Kindred agrees. "The commission, despite it not being specifically in the act, try to take a pretty liberal view and try to keep their doors open to trans people who have experienced discrimination."

But he points out that NSRAP has heard from trans people who found that "there wasn't a real understanding that the commission would consider transgender discrimination as a violation of the act." This is why the NSRAP wants to make protections for transgender individuals more explicit.

NSRAP has already met with Nova Scotia's minister of justice, Ross Landry.

"This issue is an important one, and it deserves meaningful consultation and consideration," Landry says. "The Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission plans to look into the issues, and it intends to listen to the LGBTI community, stakeholders, other interested parties, the public and government."

Landry says the Nova Scotia government recently hired a manager of sexual orientation and gender identity issues to "foster better dialogue with the LGBTI community on matters that concern them."

But legislative changes don't always mean social changes, says a member of Halifax's trans community. "For a trans person, having your identity and experiences of oppression recognized by the law can be very empowering," Shay Enxuga says.

But Enxuga says it's important "not to deceive ourselves that gaining legal protection is an end point in the fight for equality. I'm sure that many of us can agree that the addition of sex, race and sexual orientation to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms did not end sexism, racism and homophobia."

Kindred agrees, noting there are "a host of other issues on NSRAP's trans agenda, like seeking funding for trans-related surgeries and eliminating artificial barriers to name changes and gender designation changes."

He also mentions the need for progress in terms of reducing transphobia in schools and providing clear information about trans support services. "NSRAP likes to think of legal changes as just one piece of the larger puzzle."

November 2012

NSRAP presents petition for trans rights in Nova Scotia

Xtra, 2012-11-15

By Simon Thibault

In early October, it was reported that the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project was looking to have Nova Scotia's Human Rights Act amended to include protections for transgender people.

One of the main ways that NSRAP gathered support was through a petition that it circulated. Today, NSRAP presented Minister Leonard Preyra with that same petition. The petition asked that the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act include gender identity and gender expression as prohibited grounds for discrimination. NSRAP gathered more than 1,700 signatures for the petition.

In a press release, NSRAP chair Kevin Kindred is quoted as saying, "Hundreds of Nova Scotians are calling on our government to extend basic human rights to transgender members of our communities. No one should face discrimination or harassment due to their gender identity or how they express it. It's time to enshrine those basic protections into law. Including gender identity and gender expression in the Act is an important step towards making sure that transgender people are valued, supported, accepted and protected here in Nova Scotia."

NSRAP notes in the same release that it hopes "the timing of this petition will call attention to Transgender Day of Remembrance, an annual event reflecting on violence against transgender individuals, on November 20."

Speaking of the Transgender Day of Remembrance, notice has been circulated to various local queer organizations that on Nov 20, the Nova Scotia Department of Justice will be making a special announcement at Province House at 11am. No details have been released to the media or the public as of yet as to the details of the announcement.

N.S. legislation would clarify rights of transgender people

The Canadian Press, 2012-11-20

HALIFAX -- Nova Scotia's justice minister tabled amendments to the province's Human Rights Act Tuesday that would clarify the rights of transgender people.

Ross Landry told a news conference in Halifax that the changes would see gender expression and gender identity included in the law.

"I believe our community must be a place where all Nova Scotians know they are accepted," said Landry.

The changes would allow transgender people to file human rights complaints based on their identity in cases where they believe they have been discriminated against on the job or in the community.

The change was pushed for by the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project.

Kevin Kindred, chairman of the group, said although transgender people are able take discrimination complaints to the province's Human Rights Commission, they are often dealt with as cases of sexual discrimination.

He said the change would send an important message to society at large.

"It's not necessarily creating new rights, but it's creating a new understanding that discrimination against transgender people is covered by the Act," said Kindred.

Kate Shewan is a transgender person who believes the proposed change will help lift feelings of marginalization.

"This feels like we are being recognized as part of the whole community and it feels good to be included there and treated with respect."

If the legislation passes, Nova Scotia would join Ontario, Manitoba and the Northwest Territories in specifically recognizing transgender people in its human rights legislation.

Province introduces legislation to protect transgender residents

Metro, 2012-11-20

By Andrew Rankin



Kate Shewan says the province's transgender community faces its fair share of challenges.

But Tuesday's announcement that the province intends to change the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act to specifically protect the rights of transgender people will, she says, go a long way in making the province a more inclusive society.

"For a long time we've felt very marginalized and now this makes us feel that we're part of the whole community," she said.

The proposed changes to the province's Human Rights Act would include gender identity and gender expression.

Justice Minister Ross Landry announced the amendments at Province House on Tuesday morning. He said he hoped the change would help the province become a more liberal and progressive place to live.

"I believe our community must be a place where all Nova Scotians know they are accepted," said Landry.

Shewan is the treasurer of Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project, which represents transgender residents in the province. The group had been pushing the government since July to amend the legislation, with the aid of a 2,000 signature position.

Kevin Kindred, chairman of the group, said although transgender people are able take discrimination complaints to the province's Human Rights Commission, the current legislation leaves a lot up to interpretation which leads to confusion.

The changes, he said, sets the record straight for the transgender community and society at large,.

"It's not necessarily creating new rights, but it's creating a new understanding that discrimination against transgender people is covered by the Act," said Kindred.

David Shannon, CEO of the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, also spoke at the announcement and agreed with Shewan.

"This is a message that discrimination on the basis of gender is unacceptable in Nova Scotia," he said.

Other provinces which have specific human rights legislation protecting transgender people are Ontario, Manitoba and the Northwest Territories.

Nova Scotia set to further protect trans rights

Xtra, 2012-11-20

By Simon Thibault

Changes to Human Rights Bill tabled on Trans Day of Remembrance

Across the country, and around the world, Nov 20 is International Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDoR). But in Nova Scotia, it is now also the day an amendment to the province's Human Rights Bill was tabled, which means it may soon be illegal to discriminate against individuals because of their gender identity or gender expression.

Speaking at a press conference Nov 20, Leonard Preyra, Nova Scotia's minister of communities, culture and heritage, noted that the province "can send a strong and clear message that no one who faces violence and discrimination is alone."

Less than a week ago, the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project presented Preyra with a petition containing more than 1,700 signatures. It called for an amendment to the Human Rights Bill. The campaign to gather signatures for the petition began last summer, during Halifax's Pride events.

"It's something we've been working on for a while, but we've been public about it since the summer," said NSRAP's chair, Kevin Kindred. "I think it's a sign that the public support that we tried to rally around this issue this summer has been successful. This change to the act will be a clear sign that trans Nova Scotians have a right to lead safe and dignified lives, free from harassment and discrimination."

Kindred noted that NSRAP considers this change to be "a good start" and that they will continue to lobby for the trans community. "We must all commit to being part of a cultural change, to be more understanding and less rigid about traditional understandings of gender."

Kate Shewan, NSRAP's treasurer and an activist in Halifax's trans community, spoke at the press conference and recounted how she had been denied life and disability insurance because of her gender transition. "I was joking with a friend that two years ago we couldn't have imagined I'd be up here talking about trans rights. It's personally satisfying and gratifying for me to be here today to hear the government take this step."

Shewan said there is still anxiety in the trans community when it comes to discrimination, especially in terms of employment. “This is a valid fear, and I know people who have had employment issues following a transition. While changing the human rights code will not end discrimination and prejudice, it does send a strong message to employers that this discrimination is not acceptable and reassures victims of discrimination that there is recourse available to them.”

Minister of Justice Ross Landry, who tabled the bill, signalled the importance of Trans Day of Remembrance. “This is a solemn occasion. But I hope that today we can also give the community a reason to mark this day as the start of something more positive and hopeful.”

“As a society it’s important to be inclusive,” he told *Xtra*. “As a government, what we’re saying is that our diversity is our richness.”

Landry is confident the bill will pass. “I can’t speak for the opposition, but if they’re smart they’ll support this unanimously.”

Landry acknowledged there might be a backlash. “I think there are people out there who will initially not be receptive to what we’ve done. That’s a part of education. I don’t want to judge them good or bad, because that is the journey of learning.”

Legal Protection of Trans Rights a Step Forward - But Let's Not Get Complacent

Halifax Media Co-op, 2012-11-21

By Shay Enxuga

Public funding for sex-reassignment surgery needed

The Nova Scotia provincial government has recently proposed amendments that will add Gender Identity and Gender Expression as a protected category under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act.

In many ways this is a cause for celebration. Yesterday, Nov. 20, marked the Transgender Day of Remembrance, a day when we remember trans people (mostly trans women of colour) who we’ve lost this year to murder, suicide and the crushing weight of living in this transphobic world.

Having Gender Identity and Gender Expression included in the Human Rights Act will send a clear message that our government recognizes that the lives of trans people are valuable and important. And the addition of the language will offer trans people legal protection in instances of direct and individual acts of discrimination, such as being denied housing, education or employment because they are trans.

However, I think that it is important that we also take this moment to remember that gaining legal protection should not, and will not, be an end point in our fight for equality. I’m sure that many of us can agree that the addition of Sex, Race and Sexual Orientation to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms did not end sexism, racism, and homophobia. Legal protection does not end oppression and I think that it is important to remember that there is a stark difference between legal equality and day-to-day lived experiences.

I think that the push for legal equality and protection can be useful when placed within a broader understanding of how discrimination operates in Canada. Most oppression is **not** individual (as in being fired for being trans) but rather systemic (as in that a majority of trans people are under-employed and under-waged). A legal approach only addresses incidents of individual discrimination, and moreover, legal recourse is only available to those people who are able to

economically access the judicial system (which is a real barrier considering that many trans people live below the poverty line).

A legal approach does not *challenge* larger systems of oppression, and can actually serve to *reinforce* systems that perpetuate violence against trans people such as prisons and the police.

Therefore, while I think that it is important that we take this moment to celebrate the addition of Gender Identity and Gender Expression to the Human Rights Act, I think that it is also important that we do not deceive ourselves into thinking that this is the last step in ending transphobia and cissexism.

Rather, we need to recognize that the addition of this language will **only** be useful within the context of a larger struggle for cultural and economic changes that will tangibly affect the daily lives of trans people. I suggest that we harness the momentum of this legislation to push our government further, and that we use this energy to help us continue our fight.

So what we can we do?

We need to tell our provincial government that if they truly want to protect and improve the lives of trans people it needs to provide public funding for sex reassignment surgery.

Because of the reality of systemic oppression, trans people have disproportionate difficulty accessing employment, education, housing, and healthcare. What this means is that since there is currently no public funding for trans-related surgeries anywhere in the Maritimes many people can not afford to pay for surgery on a \$10/hour wage (or less). Most importantly, this means that these often life-saving procedures are unavailable to the people who need them.

Our government has recognized that trans rights are human rights, so now it's time to put that into action and extend the human right of universal health care.

We need to tell our government that we demand affordable and accessible healthcare for everyone.

We need to tell our government that we want it to make good on its promise to protect trans people.

And we need to tell our government that it is only once policies such as this are in place that the addition of Gender Identity and Gender Expression to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act will actually protect the quality of life of trans people and truly be more than an empty stab at formal equality.

I want all of us to live in a world free from transphobia and cissexism.

This is only the beginning – our fight is far from over.

January 2013

Group wants to help gay refugees

The Chronicle Herald, 2013-01-06

By Frances Willick | Staff Reporter

Goal is for N.S. to take people who face death at home for who they are

A refugee sponsorship organization based in Halifax is hoping to become the first such group in the province to bring lesbian and gay refugees to Nova Scotia.

The Rainbow Refugee Association of Nova Scotia decided to set the wheels in motion after attending a presentation by a visiting activist in 2011.

Corrie Melanson, one of Rainbow Refugee's co-ordinators, said in many parts of the world, gay people are persecuted for their sexual orientation.

"In more than eight countries, people are convicted by death for being gay or lesbian, but (they are) also just unable to find work, unable to support themselves, being beaten, just the whole gamut of human rights abuses," she said.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, lesbian, gay, transgender and bisexual people are often victims of discrimination, abuse, detention, extortion, torture or murder. Even when refugees flee their home country for another, they may continue to face those threats in their country of asylum, the agency notes.

But for groups hoping to sponsor gay refugees, finding them isn't easy.

Many refugees don't volunteer information about their sexual orientation when they apply for sponsorship or refugee status, and the high commissioner doesn't ask applicants to disclose it.

"Someone would have to come forward and be very out about being gay or lesbian in order to make a case, whereas a lot of people can't do that," Melanson said. "For safety reasons, for their own lives, for the lives of their families, they can't do that."

So, Rainbow Refugee teamed up with the Iranian Railroad for Queer Refugees, a Toronto group that assists gay and lesbian Iranians. In Iran, homosexuality is a crime that can be punishable by death, the group's website says.

The Iranian Railroad selected a refugee whose case it considers urgent and sent the file to Rainbow Refugee, which agreed to sponsor him.

The Nova Scotia group had only a handful of criteria to guide their selection, including that the refugee be single, not have significant health problems and not have ties to bigger cities such as Toronto or Vancouver.

Melanson said the organization hopes the refugee will remain in Nova Scotia.

Rainbow Refugee has also partnered with the Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services, which will assist with the sponsorship.

Evelyn Jones, the refugee sponsorship co-ordinator with Immigrant Settlement, said the refugee is from Iran, in his late 20s or early 30s and is now living in an asylum country.

Before the man is accepted into Canada, he must make a refugee application, be interviewed by someone at the Canadian Embassy in his asylum country and obtain a criminal and health check.

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Rainbow Refugee has raised about \$6,500 of the estimated \$11,000 needed to cover rent, food, clothing and transit costs for the refugee's first year in Canada. The group hopes to get about \$2,500 in matching funds from the federal government, but needs another \$2,000 to reach its goal.

The sponsorship process will likely take more than a year, but Jones said the wait will be worthwhile.

"The refugee will make great contributions to Canada, and that's what we've seen over and over. Refugees come, they work very hard, they contribute, they are involved in Canadian life in so many positive ways."

February 2013

A History of Pride

Halifax Media Co-Op, 2013-02-09

by Robert Devet

Participation in first Halifax Pride Parade required courage

HALIFAX — An exhibit at the Spring Garden Road Memorial Public Library reminds us when 75 members of the LGBTQ community marched through downtown Halifax in 1988 there was little to celebrate, and much to fear. But, it would become the annual Halifax Pride Parade, which celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary this year.

The exhibit consists of a series of panels displaying photographs, notes on context, and quotes by participants of the 1988 march. It paints a picture of a mainstream society where homophobia was the norm.

Chris Aucoin researched and curated the exhibit commissioned by Halifax Pride. Aucoin explains the parade started out as a protest against the violence that LGBTQ people were experiencing.

“For us, violence was part of the 1980s in a very big way,” says Aucoin. “There was no human rights protection. You could lose your job if it was found out that you were queer. You could lose your apartment. You could be denied service in a restaurant.”

Or you could get beaten up, Aucoin adds. He says gay bashing was common and pleas to the authorities went unheard.

A variety of events lead up to the 1988 march. The Gay Alliance for Equality, formally established in 1973, was the first organization in Nova Scotia to fight for gay rights. In 1978 there was a large national conference in Halifax of gay and lesbian activists. About 200 participants marched through Halifax.

But when 1988 arrived things had hardly improved. That was the year Eric Smith, a teacher in Shelburne County, was fired by the school board for having HIV. John William Tha Din was beaten to death in Camp Hill Cemetery, a gay cruising area. And the AIDS crisis further stigmatized anybody who was gay.

So it took a lot of courage to take part in the march. One of the participants said, “I was terrified to be found out. I was kicked out of the Reserve Forces for being gay, and being on probation while on my first civilian job.”

Aucoin explains that things didn't get any better once the march started. “Somebody drove his car into the crowd and laughed about it. People were yelling things from the sidewalk, or pointing their finger as if it was a gun and making shooting sounds. That may not sound like a big deal, but in a context of people getting physically attacked that is very real and threatening.”

The curator had been involved in gay activism in the late eighties. When researching this exhibit, he began to look into what had happened before he came onto the scene.

“In the process of doing that I crossed paths with all kinds of people,” says Aucoin. “People who were brand new to the community with very little knowledge of what transpired before and people who had been involved forever.”

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"I thought, these people need to talk to each other, to share those stories," Aucoin continues. "I decided to put them in a form and a venue that that can happen."

The exhibit at the Spring Garden Road Memorial Public Library runs until Feb. 24. Robin Metcalfe will give a talk on the significance of Pink Triangle Day on Feb. 12. Chris Aucoin will talk about the exhibit on Feb. 15.

March 2013

Parliament to Vote on Rights of Trans Canadians

Halifax Media Co-Op, 2013-03-19

by Hilary Beaumont

On March 20, the House of Commons will vote on Bill C-279, known to supporters as the “gender identity bill,” and detractors as the “bathroom bill.” If passed, the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code would be amended to protect gender identity and gender expression.

In Canada, trans people disproportionately face violence, workplace bullying, job discrimination, job loss, trouble accessing health care, lack of clarity in applying for identification and discrimination when looking for housing.

Currently, trans Canadians must file federal human rights complaints on the basis of sex, gender or disability. If C-279 becomes law, they can file based on gender identity or gender expression. Nova Scotia passed similar legislation last November.

Critics have argued the bill’s definitions of gender expression and gender identity are too broad. Alarmists have said the private member’s bill will allow pedophiles and peeping Toms to enter women’s bathrooms—a criticism trans people have said is offensive.

“The bill does a small thing by adding trans rights to the Canadian Human Rights Act and by adding trans motivated hate to the hate crimes list,” Halifax MP Megan Leslie said in parliament earlier this month. “It is a small thing, but it is a magnificent thing.”

It is not enough to fit trans people into the margins, under classifications such as sex, gender or disability, when it is none of those, Leslie said.

“It is meaningful to look at rights and see ourselves there,” she said. “It is important to know that we are protected, that we can hold up a human rights act and say, ‘I am protected. I am here in this document.’”

The MP said she had a transgender client who once requested an official legal aid letterhead that gave a legal opinion on her right to use the bathroom. “She would keep it in her purse and use it if she ran into problems,” Leslie said.

“Imagine walking around with a legal document, a legal opinion, in one’s purse or wallet to settle disputes about the right to use a bathroom. Imagine the indignity of arguing this with mall security, with a bouncer, with classmates or co-workers, just to heed the call of nature,” Leslie said.

Prior to legislation that protects trans rights in Nova Scotia, Laura MacIntosh (who identifies as gender-queer and prefers the pronoun “they”) felt vulnerable entering gendered bathrooms in Halifax.

During one incident in a female bathroom, a woman told MacIntosh: “You don’t belong here.” When MacIntosh protested, the woman responded, “You’re lying, you don’t belong here.” They had to run across to the male washroom instead.

“There was no protection for me, really—not day to day,” MacIntosh said.

This bill is not just about bathrooms. MacIntosh added their gender isn't recognized when they fill out forms, or join a sports team. When the only option is male or female, MacIntosh becomes invisible.

In Nova Scotia, MacIntosh now has the ability to file a human rights complaint when they are discriminated against in these ways.

However, a trans man, who preferred to remain unnamed, is skeptical discrimination against trans people will change anytime soon.

For the last five years, he has been trying to get a hysterectomy—major surgery to remove his uterus. He considers this surgery medically necessary because of the way the testosterone therapy interacts with his uterus. However, the surgery is not covered.

When he was 17, his parents took out a loan so he could undergo top surgery to remove his breasts. They considered fundraising to cover the surgery, but because they lived in a rural Nova Scotia town, his parents feared job loss if they brought attention to the fact their son was trans.

He is currently considering moving to another country to access health care.

"I feel worthless to my country. The system is failing me and that hurts emotionally," he said. "How can you feel any basic worth when you're being denied health care?"

Now that Nova Scotia human rights legislation covers gender identity, he could file a human rights complaint, but he says the years of court battles would be too much to handle.

There's a large difference between legislated change and discrimination in an everyday sense, he said. However, he conceded, life will likely improve for trans people in the long run.

First sexual orientation experienced a legal revolution, and now gender identity and gender expression are experiencing a similar shift. But it's not clear yet whether the lives of trans Canadians are improving.

After sexual orientation was added to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act in 1991, and then to the Canadian Human Rights Act in 1996, it brought about immediate and long-term change, according to Halifax human rights lawyer Kevin Kindred.

Initially, it simply meant people could bring human rights complaints based on sexual orientation. Eventually, people felt more comfortable coming out of the closet, which led to more visibility, spurring more social and legal change.

Currently, trans people are wary of expressing themselves publicly due to discrimination and violence. However, Kindred says legislation will make it "easier to stand up and challenge that and say, no, that's not the way that the trans experience needs to be."

But just because legal change happens doesn't mean social change will automatically fall in place, he added.

"It's important that we not delude ourselves that making the world a better place for trans people is entirely a legal project," he said.

April 2013

Transgendered teen faced suspension for using girls washroom

CTV Atlantic, 2013-04-09

A mother and her daughter are speaking out after the transgendered teen was suspended for using the girls washroom at her high school.

Judy Dwyer says her daughter Jessica Durling is like any other teenager. She enjoys spending time with her friends and likes going to school, at least, she did until last week.

The Nova Scotia teen says she was called into her principal's office at Hants East Rural High and told she would be suspended for a day for using the girls washroom.

"I was shocked, hurt," says the 17-year-old. "I thought about not just me, but everyone who will get hurt by this. I just want to live a normal life, you know."

The teen has been using the girls washroom all year, and there hadn't been any complaints. But her friend says she knew it wasn't sitting well with some students.

"A lot of students complained. I hear in class all the time, they're like, they feel so disgusted that she's in the bathroom," says Skye Parker.

Finally, a student made an official complaint and Durling was suspended.

Dwyer says she was told her daughter would be suspended indefinitely if she continued to use the girls washroom.

She also says it is very painful to see her daughter being targeted for simply being herself.

"It is wrong for them to discriminate against my child and we need education," says Dwyer.

Durling's case isn't an isolated one; a number of school boards across Nova Scotia are struggling with the same issue.

"We are in this place where we have this population saying 'OK, I want to be in my school, part of my school. I want to contribute to my community. How can I do that in a meaningful way?'" says Sheena Jamieson, support services co-ordinator for the Youth Project.

"And this other group is saying 'we don't know, we haven't prepared for it,' so we're at this point where we need to start preparing."

Late today, officials at the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board announced they would be dropping the suspension and will be developing new guidelines for schools to serve all of the students in their care.

In the end, Durling never served her one-day suspension.

She was set to appeal the decision Wednesday, but now she can safely return to school and is allowed to continue using the girls washroom until she wraps up high school in June.

Halifax awash with rainbows for anniversary of Raymond Taavel's death

Metro, 2013-04-16

By Clark Jang

Wednesday marks the one-year anniversary of the death of gay rights activist Raymond Taavel. For Kevin Kindred, the loss still stings.

"It's a pain that will continue," Taavel's friend says. "Not just on an emotional level, but certainly Raymond's contributions to the community."

Taavel was a beloved activist and leader in Halifax's LGBT community. His life was cut short after he tried breaking up a fight outside a bar on Gottingen Street last year.

He was beaten to death, with Andre Noel Denny charged with killing him. Taavel was only 49.

On a windy Tuesday afternoon some of Taavel's friends and family, along with local political leaders, gathered at the Grand Parade to raise a rainbow flag in his memory. A single bouquet of flowers was laid at the base of the flagpole.

When Taavel died, the community used rainbows to remember Taavel as a gesture of unity. Kindred says the community wanted to mark the anniversary quietly and symbolically.

"We want to remember the city that was awash with rainbows a year ago, and rekindle that sense of finding something positive despite the tragedy," he says.

Venus Envy and The Youth Project have been distributing rainbow posters and flags in memory of Taavel for people and businesses to hang in their windows.

Adam Reid, friend of Taavel's and communications coordinator of Halifax Pride, says he still sees some of last year's flags around the city.

"It's nice to see people recalling that ray of beauty in all the pain surrounding that day," he explains.

Mayor Mike Savage attended the ceremonial flag raising and says the death of Taavel is still shocking.

"Since he died he's caused a lot of people to think of what kind of community we have."

Kindred says in the end, it's a community where love triumphs adversity.

"We try to remember the love and solidarity more than the tragedy."

Gender identity dismissed in girl's bid to join all-boys soccer team

The Chronicle Herald, 2013-04-30

By Gordon Delaney | Valley Bureau

Soccer Nova Scotia: Girls can play on boys teams

NEWPORT — An online petition is asking an Annapolis Valley soccer association to allow a seven-year-old girl to play on an all-boys team because she self-identifies as a boy.

"Our child loves soccer and wants to play with peers," says the petition, posted Tuesday by parent Emilie Smith of Newport, Hants County.

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“The club has chosen to divide by gender and will not allow our child to identify by gender,” says the petition, which includes a photo of the girl, Lola, in a soccer uniform and about to kick a ball on a pitch.

The petition is addressed to the West Hants United Soccer Association. By Tuesday evening, it had garnered more than 250 names and many comments from Canada, the United States and as far away as Australia.

Lola’s parents declined requests for an interview Tuesday.

But Kevin Kindred, chairman of the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project in Halifax, said he was authorized to speak on the family’s behalf.

The group advocates on behalf of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and transgender communities in the province.

For the past few years, Lola has been expressing her wish to be treated as a boy, Kindred said.

“The child insists on dressing in boys’ clothes and has been treated like a boy by friends and classmates.

“The family is trying to do everything in their power to give the child the flexibility to choose the gender that’s appropriate.”

Lola has played soccer in recent years with a mixed team in the Windsor area.

But this month, the family had to register her at the next level of competition, in which there are no mixed teams.

“So the family had to choose an application for a girls or a boys team,” Kindred said.

Based on the child’s interests and that she self-identifies as a boy, they chose to apply for the boys team.

The soccer association’s executive denied the application. The family has asked that the decision be reviewed.

Mick Murray, executive director of the soccer association, could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

“When we spoke (Monday), the answer was clearly no, but today there appears to be some discussion about reviewing that decision,” Kindred said. “The family is hopeful that decision will be reconsidered.”

Association secretary Heather Bennett said the executive was waiting for direction from Soccer Nova Scotia.

“We want to make sure that the decision that is made is applicable for any age group, for any soccer association in Nova Scotia, as older age groups play in leagues made up of teams from many associations,” she said.

George Athanasiou, the CEO of Soccer Nova Scotia, told The Chronicle Herald on Tuesday evening that girls can play on boys teams.

According to the policies and procedures he sent to The Herald, a team usually consists of players of one sex only. But the policies clearly state that girls are permitted to compete for a place on, and play for, otherwise all-boy teams.

“The young player can compete as a member of a boys team if she makes the team,” Athanasiou said in an email.

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But boys can be denied the chance to play on all-girl teams. That policy is designed to maintain and encourage girls' and women's soccer programs, Soccer Nova Scotia says.

Many people who signed Smith's petition offered comments on why they support the family's cause.

"Because excluding trans people based on their gender identity is discrimination, and we all deserve the opportunity to express ourselves to our fullest potential," wrote Shay Enxuga of Halifax.

"Kids should be kids from the inside not the outside. Good luck," wrote Michael Muir, also of Halifax.

"She should be allowed to play with whomever she wants and where she is most comfortable," wrote Janene Gulliver of Jersey Shore, Pa.

"It's just the right thing to do," said Cassie Dixon of Newport.

Tim Hughes of Kentville wrote: "The players' skill should be the determining factor in who gets to play on the team."

Kindred said he is encouraged by the amount of online support being shown to the family.

"From an activist's perspective, it's great to see how much support this family has gotten from their own community," Kindred said. "It shows me that people are quite understanding that gender isn't always a clear-cut question."

Although the parents went public with the petition, they are concerned about what kind of scrutiny the child may face as a result, he said.

The situation is a good example of why recent changes to the provincial Human Rights Act were needed, "so that it's clear that children and adults who are transgendered have legal rights that have to be taken seriously," he said.

"I don't know what ultimately will be the outcome in this case, but just making the changes to the Human Rights Act made people more aware that this is a serious issue."

Kindred said the family has been able to connect with other families who have children in similar situations and to find support.

"That's not something that would have been possible 10 years ago," he said. "It's still difficult today, but things are changing."

May 2013

N.S. soccer association reverses decision, allows girl to play on boy's team

CTV Atlantic, 2013-05-01

A Nova Scotia soccer association has reversed its decision and allowed a young girl to play soccer with boys.

The gender battle centered on a seven-year-old girl who wanted to play soccer on a local boy's team in Hants County.

The West Hants United Soccer Association initially rejected the request.

The girl's parents say she thinks of herself more as a boy so they launched an online petition to convince the association to change its mind, and last night, it did.

"It can be tough for kids to have issues of gender identity, but the support that this family is getting is a good sign the future will be better for those kids," says Kevin Kindred, chair of the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project.

Kindred has been speaking on behalf of the family and says they don't want to push their child to make any gender identity decisions at this stage in her life.

June 2013

N.S. decides not to fund gender reassignment surgery

CBC News, 2013-06-11

94% of Canadians have funding, forcing trans people in N.S. to make tough decisions

Transgender Nova Scotians are facing tough choices after a recent decision by the province's health minister not to fund sex reassignment surgery.

Sex reassignment surgery is covered in seven Canadian provinces — for 94 per cent of Canadians — but those seeking the surgery in the Maritimes are forced to make tough choices about whether to pay for the surgery out of their own pockets.

After studying the issue, Health Minister David Wilson said in a letter last week that the province has decided not to fund the surgery.

“When we must decide which areas to fund, there are a number of items to consider. For example, what does the best available research tell us, and are we able to fund a service within our limited healthcare budget,” said Wilson.

“The department has given the matter of gender reassignment surgery considerable consideration and we went through a careful policy review, including extensive research and consultation with other jurisdictions.”

The surgery is either partially or fully funded in all provinces except Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

Proponents for covering the cost of surgery, such as the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project (NSRAP), argue that the surgery is “necessary for the well-being of many transgender Nova Scotians.”

“Nova Scotia is lagging behind other provinces and doing a disservice to trans Nova Scotians who are not getting the care they need,” NSRAP argues on its website.

“Instead, some people travel to other provinces and countries and pay out of pocket for treatment. Many others go without the medical care they need even when such services are deemed medically necessary by a care team of doctors, social workers, and psychiatrists.”

Parker Jackson, 21, was born a girl. But at 7 years old, he said looking into the mirror made him feel wrong.

“Imagine waking up every day and you're just like. ‘Ugh, this is not right. This is gross. I don't even understand myself. This is not how I belong. I need to change this’ — that's how it feels,” said Jackson.

Jackson is in the process of transitioning to life as a man.

The process involves therapy and hormone treatment, but he also needs a double mastectomy and reconstructive surgery to shape his body to fit who he is.

In Nova Scotia, that is considered an elective surgery that comes with a \$10,000 price tag.

“My friends are saving up to buy cars and saving up to get houses and move out. I'm saving up to get [chest reconstruction]surgery,” he said.

Kevin Kindred, chair of NSRAP, estimates that between six and eight Nova Scotians require the surgery each year at a cost ranging between \$30,000 and \$60,000 each.

“You and I have the right to any medically necessary surgery to be covered by [Medical Services Insurance]. There's a discriminatory decision that somehow trans people don't have that same right — and that's what we're trying to tackle,” he said.

Jackson has a choice facing all transgendered Nova Scotians — whether to put his transition on hold while he saves thousands of dollars, or move to a province that covers the surgery.

“I don't want to move, so I've never looked into it because this is my home. I probably could move, but do I want to? No. I do not want to move. I want Nova Scotia to change and I want help and I want it in my home,” he said.

Wilson said there's a lack of high-quality research about the effectiveness and long-term outcomes of sex reassignment surgery.

He said the decision to deny coverage came after a careful policy review and is declining interviews until after he meets with NSRAP on Wednesday.

N.S. to fund gender reassignment surgery (Updated)

The Chronicle Herald, 2013-06-12

By Sherri Borden Colley | Staff Reporter

Health minister met with Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project

Nova Scotia will become the eighth province to fund sex reassignment surgery, the NDP government announced Wednesday.

The news came after a meeting between Health Minister Dave Wilson and members of the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project.

“Based on the values and direction this government has taken on the issue, I am happy today to confirm funding for gender reassignment surgery,” Wilson later said in a news release. “This morning I met with members of the LBGTI community to communicate this decision.”

Wilson said he came to this conclusion after reviewing medical evidence and the policies of other provinces that fund the procedure.

“This is an extremely complex issue, and I know over the last number of weeks I asked the department to look at this and revisit where the barriers (are) in place for Nova Scotians who want to seek the support of the health-care system for this type of surgery,” Wilson told reporters.

“Today I met with the Rainbow Action group to advise them that we are going to take down those barriers, that we're going to move as quickly as we can to ensure that Nova Scotians who find themselves in the position that they want to choose to have the reassignment surgery done, that they can get it done here in Nova Scotia, and I fully support that.”

Previously, the province had said it could not pay for reassignment surgery due to a restriction in MSI regulations. That restriction will be removed immediately, Wilson said.

The province enshrined transgender rights in legislation in November.

Kevin Kindred, chairman of the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project, told The Chronicle Herald he was pleased to have been called in to meet with the minister Wednesday morning.

“It's a very different message than what we received in writing last week,” Kindred said, referring to a letter the group received from the Health Department saying the province had decided not to fund the surgery.

“We’re really happy to see this development. It’s something we’ve been working on for a long time. There will be further work required from here, so we don’t have a commitment as to the specifics of what funding will look like. That varies province by province.”

In general, the cost of sex reassignment surgery ranges from \$30,000 to \$60,000, the Rainbow Action Project’s website says.

Kindred estimates six to eight Nova Scotians undergo the surgery each year.

Some Nova Scotians have obtained the surgery at their own cost, and others have been forced to move to another province to have it.

Kate Shewan, a Halifax-area resident who was male-identified at birth but is now female, said she “was overjoyed” with the government’s reversal on funding.

“It’s something that the community has been pushing for for a very long time, and it’s really just the right thing to do,” Shewan said. “We’re glad that the government has just finally made that step.”

Shewan’s transition happened over the past three years. She preferred not to say if she has had surgery.

“For many, many trans people, surgery is a hugely important piece of the transition and it was basically unattainable for many people just because of this lack of funding,” she said.

“Research has shown that a gender transition, including a surgery component, has really been shown to improve the quality of life for people. It takes away that distress and discomfort that’s caused by the situation where your gender or your internal experience of gender doesn’t match your sex assignment at birth. To be able to rectify that really relieves that distress, which can impact all areas of life, really.”

Sheena Jamieson, support services co-ordinator for the Youth Project, a Halifax agency that provides support and services to young people on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, has many questions about Wednesday’s announcement.

“When is this going to happen, what is it going to look like, does the transgender community have a voice in this kind of process afterwards?” Jamieson asked.

“So we have a lot of questions, but we’re also very stunned and very excited that there’s been such a reversal.”

New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island are the two remaining provinces that do not fund gender reassignment surgery.

‘Big surprise’ for advocate as province to start funding gender reassignment surgery

Metro, 2013-06-12

By Haley Ryan

For Kate Shewan, the last week has been a “rollercoaster.”

On Wednesday, the province announced it would cover gender reassignment surgery, just days after the health minister sent a letter to the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project (NSRAP) saying the procedure wouldn’t be paid for.

“To actually come around and say ‘yes they are (paying),’ was a big surprise,” said Shewan, treasurer with the NSRAP.

“I was overjoyed with that really, really exciting news.”

Health minister David Wilson said the surgeries will be covered under MSI, and section 4.8 of the Physician’s Manual that prohibits funding for the procedure will be immediately removed.

Wilson said the change came after meeting with NSRAP, reviewing medical evidence, and examining if there were any barriers for Nova Scotians who wanted government support for the surgery.

“When we do have legislation or policies in place that are hindering those individuals from moving forward, and ensuring they can gain access to the services they need, then we need to change that,” Wilson said.

“This decision really comes down to doing the right thing.”

Kevin Kindred, NSRAP chair, said likely 6 to 8 people a year would receive the surgery, based on the numbers in seven other provinces already providing funding.

“There has to be patient-by-patient assessment that it is medically necessary, so it’s not simply a matter of demand, just like you and I can’t insist on having heart surgery,” Kindred said.

Kindred said the ballpark cost for the surgeries ranges between \$30-60,000.

Shewan said this surgery is “a little bit different” than other funding shortfalls the public hopes to have covered because the restrictions were targeting a specifically marginalized community.

“It will make them feel like it’s going to allow them to be a complete person,” said Shewan of the surgery.

Wilson said he has spoken with Doctors Nova Scotia, and over the next few weeks the department will form a policy outlining what procedures will be covered.

EDITORIAL: Gender-change ruling welcome

The Chronicle Herald, 2013-06-13

The French have a phrase for it: “Être bien dans sa peau” — to be happy with oneself, to be comfortable in one’s own skin.

We’ve all experienced the opposite of that feeling, a sense of discomfort that might be akin to what a transgender person feels, day in, day out, as he or she struggles to make sense of being physically one gender, but intellectually, psychologically and emotionally another.

Says Nova Scotia’s Parker Jackson, 21, born a girl but longing, by age 7, to be a boy:

“Imagine waking up every day and you’re just, like, ‘Ugh, this is not right — I don’t even understand myself,’ — that is how it feels,” Jackson, now in the process of becoming a man, told CBC News.

The road to changing one’s gender is long and difficult, involving counselling, hormone therapy, and for some, surgery.

Health Minister Dave Wilson, however, said this week that the Department of Health will pay for sexual reassignment surgery after years of lobbying by, among others, the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project. Nova Scotia is the eighth province to pay for the surgery, with only New Brunswick and P.E.I. refusing to fund it.

From six to eight Nova Scotians undergo the surgery each year, says Kevin Kindred of the coalition. Surgery costs from \$30,000 to \$60,000 per case.

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It's a welcome move for people seeking surgery, many of whom are young and ill-equipped to pay huge medical bills in the treatment of what physicians term gender identity disorder.

"When you think about it, it's a condition that, if people were able to get the hormones and the surgeries that they needed and were ready to accept, then this condition could effectively be cured," nurse Anita Keeping of Capital Health's Pride Health said in 2011.

The surgery, which has been performed in Halifax in the past, will take place at the QEII Health Sciences Centre.

In her book *She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders*, Maine's Jennifer Finney Boylan talks about the secret she kept, as a husband and father of two, and her transition from male to female.

"We can no more choose our gender than we can choose our height," she said in a 2003 interview.

Experts say people who don't get therapy are at higher risk for drug use, other mental health problems or suicide.

Wilson had written the coalition recently to say the province wouldn't pay for the service but, like the gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender community itself, we applaud the province for reversing its decision and deciding to pay for the treatment, here at home, needed by this group of Nova Scotians.