

2SLGBTQIA+ Questionnaire for Waterloo Region Municipal Candidates

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Do you identify as a member of a 2SLGBTQIA+ community?

No

What role are you running for?

City Council - Ward 10

What do you believe are the most critical issues for the local 2SLGBTQIA+ community? If elected, how would you work with the local community to address these issues?

I believe the main concerns of 2SLGBTQI+ people are safety and inclusion. For the past number of years I've noticed an increase in the amount of hate that some feel empowered to verbalize online, in public and across many media outlets. I would not tolerate hate and would make that declaration a priority for all city facilities, events and operations. Hate speech is harmful and has no place in our city. These values could be imbedded in the operations of the city through staff training, signage in public spaces and a method to monitor and enforce this value. 2SLGBTQI folks ought to feel safe and included in all the city's operations. I would look to increase the number of gender-neutral spaces (washrooms etc.), and make city facilities more appealing to the community programming inviting service providers to make use of space with fewer barriers. Partnerships with community groups and organizations can be sought out to ensure all City of Kitchener spaces are well utilized with 2SLGBTQI folks in mind. Inclusion might also be represented by recruiting more staff with lived experience, ensure there is advisors on various committees and have meaningful uptick of feedback.

Have you ever participated in 2SLGBTQIA+ Cultural Competency Training?

As a school social worker, I've participated in various trainings related to 2SLGBTQI+ issues. I've enjoyed some offered by KW Counselling, some provided at the Laurier MSW Faculty, Egale and through the WCDSB partnerships. I also have a great deal of direct experience supporting many young people and partnering with families as they navigate barriers, face stressors related to homophobia and transphobia and have spoken up against the systemic barriers in education that perpetuate marginalization of 2SLGBTQI voices.

Systemic homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are still prevalent in our community, resulting in significant socioeconomic disparities within 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. If elected, how will you combat homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia?

In the campaign I've spoken to people who have been threatened with evictions due to their trans identity. I'd look to create policy that would hold landlords accountable for oppressive actions such as this. I would work to promote voices of community members to ensure that we can build pride and compassion in our community for all, recognizing that it is through love, inclusion and safety that people can survive and thrive. This awareness whether through city events, communications or campaigns, could bridge the divide to share better information more widely and de-center privileged voices and focus.

If elected, how would you address the ongoing issues of homelessness and mental health, especially as they disproportionately affect members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community?

As a volunteer with A Better Tent City, I'd develop more access to a tiny home type of shelter. Many 2SLGBTQIA+ community members may not feel safe in our shelter system, so it may be helpful to work with local organizations and groups to develop a more appropriate response to ensure people feel safe and included in the housing solutions available. My good friend Lucy Gallo helped create the first 2SLGBTQIA+ shelter in Canada as part of the Egale organization. We could look to this model and see if we can translate aspects of it to Kitchener. I would create more accountability of housing providers to ensure non-discriminatory practices that may impact 2SLGBTQIA+ people in either ability to access or to keep rentals etc.

Do you agree with the statement that "trans rights are human rights, and must be protected as such?"

Yes. I have many friends that identify as trans and they are as human as anyone else. As a former settlement worker for the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, I encountered many people who had to flee their homeland due to homophobia, transphobia or biphobia, making them unsafe. I would hate for anyone to have to flee Kitchener due to a lack of safety here.

What is one motion would you bring to council that you think will improve the lives of specifically queer people, racialized individuals and/or marginalized residents and why?

I would propose that the city adopt a "no tolerance" rule for hate in city facilities. It is harmful to the whole community if all do not feel welcome and safe in city spaces. I would facilitate a survey to hear if 2SLGBTQIA+, racialized or marginalized residents find city of Kitchener facility spaces welcoming, safe or inviting. This data could translate into an action plan.

When thinking about our schools, do you agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in books and lessons is critical at all grade levels? How would you support 2SLGBTQIA+ students in schools?

As a school social worker, I am frequently asked to guide staff, administration and school communities in developing their level of understanding related to 2SLGBTQIA+ strengths and needs. Books are an amazing vehicle for discussion, understanding, empathy and love. I would hope that all libraries have a range of representations present, and I trust the robust systems in place that analyze and categorize according to appropriateness for various developmental stages.

Libraries are great spaces to provide opportunities for students to see themselves in the content at school and feel like they have value and are enough as they are. At work I connect classrooms to the wonderful array of programming in the community, I support students to better find healthy outlets that meet their needs (OK2BME - GSA supports, groups etc.). I regularly navigate the very nuanced layers with students, building their capacity to cope with the ongoing coming out process, supporting the school to understand this journey and respect the students place at each point of that journey. I think we can continue to challenge the school communities to have strong values of inclusion, love and welcome. All stakeholders in our institutions can build their empathy by participating in skillful programming to broaden understanding and increase awareness.