

**RAINBOW FLAG RAISING CEREMONY SPEECH  
HWDSB'S EDUCATION CENTRE  
20 EDUCATION COURT, HAMILTON, ONTARIO  
MONDAY, JUNE 11, 2018**

Hello. My name is Lyla Miklos. I self-identify as bisexual or queer. I am a cisgender woman. I use the pronouns she and her.

I currently work for the HWDSB as the Temporary Accounts Administrator for Glendale Secondary School. I have been an OCTU member of OSSTF D21 for nearly a decade.

I have been a queer activist in Hamilton for over two decades and over that time I have lived through profound changes that have affected our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, two spirit, plus - LGBTQI2S+ communities.

I remember sitting at the Education Centre downtown as your LGBTQI2S+ Equity policy was passed by your Board of Trustees over a decade ago while protestors brought flashlights and Bibles with them into the Council Chambers praying that the policy would not pass.

That day, I sat next to a queer youth, supporting them as they shared their story with Trustees about the fear and rejection and hate they had experienced in school. They let the Trustees know that being recognized for their differences and more importantly being accepted and protected by their school board would help end the isolation, depression and suicides that so many LGBTQI2S+ youth had experienced.

As a member of staff I have had the privilege and pleasure of serving as an advisor for Gay Straight Alliance Clubs at the schools I have worked at. Although I have been a queer activist for decades I always ended up learning new things by working with the students in these clubs. More importantly they also gave me hope that the next generation will create a future free from the stigma my generation and the generations before me had experienced.

The LGBTQI2S+ community has made many gains. Across the country same sex marriage is legal. Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression are all protected groups under the Human Rights Code. We have out queer politicians in just about every level of government in every province and territory.

We see ourselves in films, television shows, plays, and books. Just about every community in Canada has a local Pride Day Celebration.

But these gains are also something that we shouldn't take for granted. Our rights are never static. In over 72 countries across the globe homosexuality is still criminalized and in 8 of those countries simply being LGBTQI2S+ means the death penalty.

Hate and violence have always been a part of our human existence. In my lifetime here in Canada I have seen less and less mainstream acceptance of hate and discrimination towards the LGBTQI2S+ Community. But recently our political climate has changed. Hate is not only being tolerated and excused, but being spoken by our elected leaders and repeated and acted upon by their followers. We live in troubling times. Words and actions that were once considered repugnant are coming at us in a tidal wave of hate with even more platforms of delivery in this digital information age we live in.

Just two weeks ago hate groups disrupted a Pride Event down the road in Dunnville and advocated genocide against the LGBTQI2S+ community.

The Toronto Pride Parade at the end of this month will end in a sea of participants wearing black to recognize the deaths of multiple gay men at the hands of a serial killer who targeted our community. Hamilton Pride will be holding their annual festival at Gage Park this year on Sunday, June 17th. This year's festival has a sombre cloud over it. We see the rise of hate, fear and violence and many of us are filled with sadness, despair, and trauma.

Now more than ever we need to stand up and be heard and speak out against these forces. We can't allow this to be our new normal. We have made so much progress. To go backwards now wouldn't just be a shame. It would be a travesty. An attack on one of us is an attack on all of us. We need to continue building a world filled with love, acceptance, peace, equity and hope for our children and our children's children.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu said: "Opposing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is a matter of justice. It is also a matter of love. Every human being is precious. We must all be allowed to love each other with honour. All belong. All are meant to be held in this incredible embrace that will not let us go. All."