

November 4, 2012

**Queer Ontario  
2012 Annual General Meeting  
Chairperson's Report**

This past year, the fall of 2011 to the present has once again been a very busy one for Queer Ontario. In reflecting on our activities over the past 12 months there is much we can be proud of via the numerous accomplishments we achieved, much that we can be grateful for in terms of the commitment of talented volunteers and activists and the excitement of new ideas as Queer Ontario continues to expand and look to the future. Yet, such successes and future growth come with their challenges, challenges we need to be cognizant of and seek further support to address if we are going to continue to pursue the critical, progressive, liberationist goals of our mandate.

**Accomplishments:** The most high profile political accomplishments of this past year can be pointed at a span of nine (9) days in June that will go down in history as major victories for the LGBTQ communities when two legislative bills passed in the provincial legislature, with Queer Ontario having a hand in both. Bill 13: Accepting Schools Act, 2012 passed into law on June 5, 2012 to strengthen anti-bullying measures, including the right of Ontario students organizing GSAs regardless of whether they are enrolled in Catholic or secular school systems. On June 13, 2012, Bill 33: Toby's Act: (Right to be Free from Discrimination and Harassment Because of Gender Identity or Gender Expression), 2012 amended the Ontario Human Rights Code to include 'gender identity and gender expression' as enumerated characteristics warranting the same rights and protections as those held by all others currently named in the Code.

As we are all aware, much time and hard behind the scenes work went into the passing of both these bills. A theme that runs through these political accomplishments is the success Queer Ontario experienced working in coalition with various individuals, groups and organizations. With regard to Bill 13, Queer Ontario availed itself and supported courageous queer and straight allied youth in their battles with their respective Catholic school boards for the right to organize gay-straight alliances led by the devoted work of our Vice Chairperson Casey Oraa who consistently maintained a respectful and sensitive approach with the affected youth ensuring that their agency always came first. Casey along with myself and led by Queer Ontario's Education Advisor, Ken Jeffers, undertook a policy analysis of the proposed Bill 13 that were eventually picked up as the "Queer Ontario Amendments" by the opposition NDP and used to ensure Bill 13 had real teeth, proving we could actually work with a government party for the benefit of our communities. With regard to the latter, Queer Ontario supported the passing of Bill 33 by respecting the leading work of the Trans Lobby Group on this issue and taking our direction from QO Member-at-Large Davina Hader and liaising with TLG's Susan Gapka. When like progressive minds come together such coalition work is invaluable at accomplishing the innovative goals we set out for our communities and ourselves.

Yet the work of Queer Ontario is not always so clear cut. Once again, Queer Ontario raised our voices in concern regarding the direction Pride Toronto continues to take in abdicating its internal responsibility in dealing with conflicts between participating groups and leaving it to a

self-appointed Dispute Resolution Panel whose questionable processes leave many unanswered questions, groups having to defend their participation and city councilors once again threatening to defund Pride. A fundamental principle of liberation is that of freedom of speech and this ill conceived process fails to address that. ServiceOntario revised its Vital Statistics Act to permit transgender individuals the right to change the gender on their birth certificates without sex reassignment surgery. Although we recognize that this is a step in the right direction, we feel there is much more the government needs to do to more adequately recognize gender as a non-binary concept and be more inclusive of all gender fluid people.

On the research and education front we saw an ongoing commitment to the writing and completion of policy and position statements that help to define our liberation ethos and practically our stance on issues as they arise, as most skillfully led by Research and Education Chairperson Alana Boltwood. To ensure we do not become too insular, the development of Queer Ontario's Think Tank via the efforts of Alana and Martin Otarola and other members of the committee has expanded our cyber space to include the works of others that are based on a radical queer sensibility to challenge us and others. More behind the scenes, work on the Queer Liberation Theory Project continues, now in post-production, Research Assistant A.J. Lowik and Cinematographer Davina Hader and I are currently editing over 36 interviews we conducted and are soon to begin researching archival materials for a feature documentary that is shaping up to be part historical narrative, part think piece and part socio-political education regarding the state of the LGBTQ movement and where it's heading.

Underscoring all of this work is our political message: that as queers we should be liberated to create and live the kind of lives we want to live as we define it. This is the crux of a liberationist perspective and it is proving to be relevant to more and more people. To illustrate this through social media our news listserv currently reaches 245 individuals; we are being followed on Facebook by 700 people, close to 100 more than last year; and on Twitter we have experienced an increase of close to 500 individuals over last year's 870 to a current 1,362 followers. All of this add up unscientifically and roughly (due to repeats and spammers) to a total of 2,307 followers. Our members are represented in 37 locations across Ontario, three locations outside of Ontario in Canada, and four locations outside Canada in the US. The value of our vision and mission is increasingly resonating.

**Ode to Volunteers/Activists:** In discussing these accomplishments, I have named a number of active members of Queer Ontario who were and are integral to these successes. In addition to these accomplishments, these same individuals all contribute to the ongoing less noticeable work of Queer Ontario to help keep it afloat. Additionally, we have a dedicated and highly detailed Treasurer in Richard Hudler who keeps us fiscally responsible, challenging us to carefully manage our minimal financial resources. Dwayne Shaw, our Fundraising and Events Chairperson, reminds us of the importance of play and that we are not to be 'all work.' This past year we commemorated the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of 'sexual orientation' being included in the Ontario Human Rights Code in December where we also resurrected the John Damien Award, we hosted a 'Bills Victory Party' to celebrate the passing of Bills 13 and 33 in June. We even planned for our 2<sup>nd</sup> Queer Ontario Pinq Potluq Picniq, but unfortunately Mother Nature did not smile down on us that day and delivered rain instead. All of these active individuals are to be

commended as well as numerous others who support our work in their own way, as Queer Ontario would not be able to do the work we do without any of them.

**Challenges:** Despite these many accomplishments and the strength of our skilled and committed activists and volunteers, Queer Ontario is clearly not without its challenges:

- The committee model structure that Queer Ontario developed in undertaking its ongoing work is currently having great difficulty sustaining itself
- Our active core is beginning to shrink with expansion of new active members happening at a slow pace
- We have an abundance of ideas and fewer and fewer resources, both human and financial, to deliver them
- Although we are sensitive to all forms of diversity (i.e. gender, age, race, ethnicity, class status, etc.), we continue to fall far too short of actively representing most of them

**New Directions:** Recognizing such challenges, Queer Ontario has already begun to address them via three new directions for our organization: (1) expanding our reach, (2) opening dialogue and (3) attracting new active members and volunteers.

1. Over the past couple of years active members of Queer Ontario have gone to Pride festivities in communities across the province to ensure our presence, introduce ourselves, network and potentially make valuable connections for future collaborative work. Since April of this year, we have been livestreaming our monthly meetings, to allow anyone from across the province, interested in attending and has access to a computer, to do so without physically having to be there.
2. Although not perfect as a technology, it is a somewhat helpful tool to assist us in opening up dialogue with those not based here in Toronto. To this end, we are opting to livestream most of our meetings and public events to allow for accessibility and broader dialogue. Additionally, Martin is conducting an ongoing 'Pressing Issues' online survey in which he gathers data from queers across Ontario as to what their pressing issues are, which we've now begun to use in guiding our work to assist us in maintaining our relevance to queer Ontarians and respecting our mission. Furthermore, we will be launching the Queer Ontario Salons later this month. On Thursday, November 22, 2012 Queer Ontario will be looking at "The State of Queer Health in Ontario" with guest speaker Anna Travers, director of Rainbow Health Ontario. This will be the first of a series of four Salons a year that will engage in critical political discussion on topics important to queers. It will be free, accessible (including livestreaming), social and have plenty of networking opportunities.
3. Importantly, one of our newer active members, Peter Moore is Queer Ontario's new Volunteer Outreach Coordinator. He will soon be embarking on a volunteer outreach plan to attract new activists and volunteers to the work of Queer Ontario, providing a place for these volunteers to apply their skills or learn new ones and strengthen the

infrastructure of Queer Ontario so that we can continue to do the important queer liberation work we do.

**Conclusion:** As I said in my Chairperson's Report at last year's AGM, Queer Ontario is a work in progress and one year later that work continues. We have much to be proud of, both in terms of the political change we had a direct hand in and how we are becoming relevant to more and more people who are choosing to tap into what we have to offer. One of our greatest assets is the strength of our current active members. Yet, it would be naïve to believe that this will last undaunted. The promise of Queer Ontario going forward is in the new directions we are taking to address those challenges and the opportunities they produce for those of us currently involved and those of you as yet to be involved. Critical queer liberation work is serious but fun, difficult but important, both life changing and society changing, and at once challenging and thrilling. We hope you will join us as we embark on the future of Queer Ontario.

Thank you.

Nick Mulé  
Chairperson,  
Queer Ontario