CAW Pride Activist Program

In August, 2010, the CAW held our first Pride Activist Program. All in all, we had a wonderful week. Activists from across the country, and from nearly every sector our union represents, attended.

Amongst us there were: Workplace Chairpersons, Women’s Advocates, Human Rights Committee Chairs, Benefits Reps, LBGT Caucus co-Chairs, National Reps, Community Based Organizers, Shop Stewards, Pride Committee Chairs, Workplace Trainers, Health & Safety Committee Members, Guides, Bargaining Committee Members, Council Delegates, Trustees, Sargeant-of-Arms, and general activists – a pretty powerful and well-rounded group!

We set ourselves an ambitious agenda for the week:
- To analyze the current socio-political climate on LGBT issues (a weather report).
- To undertake a needs assessment for our union and members on LGBT issues.
- To develop our vision for equality.
- To evaluate our current strategies and events.
- To make strategic plans for going forward and moving the agenda (and our union) further on LGBT issues.
- To develop our activist skills (critical thinking, new media, public speaking, information gathering, campaigning, strategic planning)
- To make strong, long-lasting connections between LGBT activists.

The background for our conversations included:
- Results from our on-line survey of CAW LGBT members and allies
- CAW Workers in Transition document
- Egale report on intersectionality of race and sexual orientation

The pages that follow include records of some of our discussions – they don’t capture the full flavour of our week, but they do give some hints about the meaningful conversations we began.

Our first Pride Activist Program deserves to be celebrated. Ten years ago we held our first National Pride Conference, and ten years from now we’ll be even further along on LGBT issues, as we work together to carry this work forward.

To those of you who were at our first Pride Activist Program – thanks for being such a solid, open group. To those CAW LGBT activists who weren’t there,
please join us next time. And to our allies – we can’t do this without the tremendous support you offer – thank you.

In pride & solidarity,

Sue Carter
CAW National Representative
Pride – Human Rights Department
Superproud Moments

Being at pride with allies and volunteers
Negotiating same-sex benefits and pensions 1992
Pride Conference 2010
Queering Port Elgin at our 2007 Pride Conference
Attending first Pride parade
Pride in our Union Conference
My leadership calling on me when they needed guidance on LGBT issues
Helping a friend come out
Leadership supporting request for organizing an equity event
World Women’s March - being out and included
First time attending London’s Pride Parade
Making a difference in the workplace as a gay man
Attending Out Games in Montreal for the union
Winning an election as first openly gay man on union executive
Being on the Equity Panel during 4-week PEL
Being interviewed and televised as CAW LGBT union activist
Starting Local 1285 Pride Standing Committee
Starting Pride TCA Quebec
Being elected Pride Chair
Being appointed to CAW staff
Coming out at work

In every community something works.
What we focus on becomes our reality.
What we pay attention to, grows.
Reality is created in the moment – there is more than one reality.
The act of asking questions influences us in some way.
People have more confidence and comfort to journey when they carry forward parts of the past.
If we carry forward parts of the past, they should be what is best.
It is important to value differences.
The language we use creates our reality.
Weather Report

What is the current climate on LGBT issues? Is it “variably cloudy”, “sunny with chance of light rain”, “hailstorm”, or is there a “severe thunderstorm warning in effect”?

What are the storm clouds? (i.e. impending issues, problems, people, trends)

What are the raindrops? (general drizzle, downpours – e.g. harassment, the word ‘gay’, heterosexism)

What’s the sunshine? (what do we have going for us, what have we achieved)

What’s the rainbow? (what stands between the sun and the storm – what are our strengths)

What’s the lightning? (where are the flashpoints, key events, crisis moments)
Needs Assessment

What do we need from leadership?

Ken Lewenza marching with us at Pride events • The offer of support – for pride events • Visibility / voices / support (march with us, go to pride flag-raisings, join us) • Negotiate workplace transition polices for trans workers in every collective agreement • More anti-homo/transphobia education on the floor • Meet with Caucuses and ask how they can help us • Guidance • Find a way to communicate to all our LGBT members in the workplace • More press • Spots on Local Union Exec Boards • Discussion of our issues at CAW Councils and in public forums • All members of Committees support us and attend our parades, conferences, etc. • Back us on important issues • Talk the Talk – Walk the Walk • Implement change • We need an equity space for LGBT on the NEB • Mandatory anti-harassment training • Visibility of LGBT in servicing and staff reps (10%) •

What do rank and file LGBT members need from the union?

Support us in our needs • Understanding of issues in the workplace • Visibility of LGBT issues and people in the union • LGBT person in the office – someone they can talk to • Negotiate workplace transition policies • Direction • Physical presence in the workplace in times of harassment / anti-LGBT incidents • Access to structures in the union (electability difficult due to phobias in some workplaces) • Swift action when rights are violated • Safe place to be heard without prejudice • Provide LGBT members to deal with our issues discretely • LGBT Department & Director • Gay Advocate in the workplace (like Women’s Advocate) • Hotline to report homo/transphobia harassment • Enforce the harassment policy •

What do LGBT organizations in Canada need from our union?

Visible presence • Respect • To use our member communications to get their message out • To put the CAW logo on their issues (to further credibility) • The need our voice and the power of our numbers • Have them come to Port Elgin • Access to the Social Justice Fund • Solidarity – they go to our events, we go to theirs • Inclusion • Support and guidance • To see us, CAW LGBT members, taken seriously and given space and a place to have our courses, literature, booklets, pins – promoting positive images of LGBT community • A pride structure •
What do we need from each other?
Love and support. • Contact lists • Specialized knowledge (i.e. trans issues) • To come out • Understanding of each other • Smiles, laughter, warmth • A promise to sustain our efforts in between our gatherings • Sharing of information, victories, struggles • Accessibility to each other • Dignity and respect towards everyone • Support groups for those who feel (and may be) alone in their workplace / community • Attend each other’s activities (i.e. small towns need support) • Commitment to see each other again • Sharing resources on services, activities in local communities • Commitment to stay in touch to support each other’s struggles •

What do international LGBT people need from us?
Support / networking • Lobby our government in order to influence change in international anti-gay policy • Financial aid • Guidance • To draw upon our experiences and knowledge • For us to hold onto our gains so that they have the space to push their governments to step up to equality • For us to listen and not make racist assumptions about their cultures • Letter writing – we can help influence change in their countries • For us to ask how we can help them with their campaigns • Ask for their experience and strength to be shared • To address specific action and build a CAW campaign accordingly • Media coverage – make injustices a ‘hot issue’ so people know about them • For us to fight for better refugee and immigration policies for those wanting to come to Canada •

What do LGBT members need us to do this week/year?
Identify ourselves publicly (pins, clothing, etc.) • Sponsor and organize LGBTQ events • Visibly participate in union and community parades, protests, meetings, committees, etc • Keep in contact with each other • Build a communications network with structure • Share everything we have done here • Be their voice for their issues • Continue to create space for queer issues to be brought forward to our leadership / union structure • Build stronger relationships • Come up with new ideas / resources •

What do leadership need from us this week/ this year?
Hear our stories • Our participation in the local • Our voice on the floor at Council and at membership meetings about ongoing / current issues of homo/transphobia in our individual workplaces • The need us to make specific demands • They need to hear we appreciate them • They need us to take a leadership role • To let all our executive know what is important and that we expect them to take our issues to Council • If we don’t tell them what we want, we won’t get anything! • Invite them into our classroom • To listen to our issues and concerns and to empower us to react accordingly • They need us to be visible to show a need to address LGBT issues • To know we are many - people in our workplaces think we are few •
What do LGBT people in the community need from our union?
To get the CAW on board to support their issues • For the CAW to respond when there’s a gay/trans bashing • For CAW members to get involved in local community organizations • To be included in rallies to build solidarity (i.e. pension rally does not only affect union workers) • Empowerment and acceptance in the union • They need to see us working together with other organizations • Media support and strength • Help organize their workplaces • To organize events with them • More visibility about our convictions / stand – so they can participate in events with us • For us to work better with other unions • To hold combined actions / statements •

Vision

“Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.”

It’s the year 2025. We’ve accomplished everything we could ever have wanted on LGBT issues. As you look around, how can you tell?

Trans equity in hiring policies in all collective agreements (with targets met) • They are teaching LGBT history in schools • We won’t have forgotten our struggles • People won’t assume I’m straight (and Phil won’t assume they’re gay…) • There won’t be any gay bashing • There will be no discriminatory laws against LGBT people anywhere in the world • There might not be any pride parades – or they might be even bigger • Walk down the streets and hold hands –and nobody cares • We wouldn’t be any different • No surprises • We’ll be older and wiser • No more excuses • Gay couples can have children without having to jump through hoops • Listen to the news and not hear that people are still being executed for being gay • Local union president might be LGBT • HIV/AIDS won’t be known as a “gay disease” • Maybe there is a cure for HIV/AIDS • You will see LGBT folks represented in mainstream media and community without being ‘token’ and without standing out • All countries have equal marriage • Nobody has to come out to anyone • Equal access to reproductive technology • Equal access to medical services, health care • Childcare / birth certificate forms give space for LGBT families • No bullying, no homophobia • Show affection in public without fear • Cure for HIV/AIDS • Everyone is out at work • Anti-gay language not used (or immediately challenged) • Gay PM in Canada • End to Palestinian/Israeli war • Men dance at
weddings without fear PDAs (public displays of affection) – no fear! • No more closets • We’ve reached 20%! • “Gay” isn’t an issue • Sex reassignment surgeries covered by medicare • People who don’t fit the norm aren’t harassed • Trans / intersex recognized • Affordable housing for all • Proper nutrition available for all • Elder care for LGBT community • Pay equity • No more news stories of “gay eradication day” (aka Jamaica) • LGBT workers don’t try to stay ‘under the radar’ anymore • LGBT out in pro-sports • Conservative Party dried up / abolished • First LGBT Prime Minister Hospices and retirement homes for LGBT communities • LGBT candidates in all elections • It will be brilliant!

It’s the year 2025, what are the three things you are most proud of that the union has done on LGBT issues? (think big and be specific)

Full-time LGBT Department • Mandated Pride Committees in every local • Visibly diverse leadership • All CAW locals honour the struggles of May 17th • Affirmative Action LGBT spot on the NEB • Trans CAW President • Regional Pride Conferences have been re-instated (bi-annual) • Pride Activist Course continues • Pride Leadership Courses (e.g., Bargaining, Health & Safety) • New Pride Allies program • Our locals are visibly diverse • Queer Flying Squads (QFS) • Union responds to bashing in all communities • Pride Department created (2015) • LGBT department with own Director • LGBT member on the NEB • All elected union exec must participate in Pride parades “This Ain’t Going Away” video updated (to remove HIV/gay man reference) • Large contingents of allies at parades • Leadership stand up for trans issues • October 11th (Coming Out Day) is a holiday • Port Elgin is full of LGBT participants • We are maintaining all we have achieved LGBT Exec Seats • Constitution changed to add Pride Committees • Celebrating our 15th anniversary of 1st CAW Pride Activist Program • We are represented with all our diversity in our political /union / workplace lives • Union has provided totally safe workplace – through harassment policies, contracts, collective bargaining, enforcement •
What courageous thing did you do in 2010/2011 that paved the way for this vision?

Participated • I was out as an LGBT activist • Visibly participated • Made myself as visible as a lesbian as I could • Organized protests and rallies • Started and maintained an active LGBT committee in local 1120 • Created North Eastern Ontario Regional Pride Committee • Came out to all the local unions I service • Pushed to create an AIDS memorial at the Port Elgin Family Ed Centre • Created a Pride Garden at my union hall • Became the spokesperson for LGBT issues at local union meetings • Created a Pride memorial in Port Elgin • Made a vow to be out 24/7/365 • More out in the community leading events to lobby government on LGBT issues • Wrote Ken Lewenza and invited him to Pride Toronto and other events • Encouraged others to be more active • Lobbyed my local for an LGBT Equity seat on our Local Exec Board • Came out (more often) in broader community, lobbying for change •
Anti-Racism

‘Working in coalition is never easy. If it’s easy, you ain’t doing it right.’

Audre Lorde

Challenging questions:

What is the responsibility of the white LGBT community to take on racism?

What opportunities do LGBT union activists have to take on racism?

What concrete things could we do to create / strengthen our relationships with our local and national union Human Rights Committees and Worker of Colour Caucuses?

Provoking thoughts:

“Studies on the prevalence of homophobia within African-American communities are at best inconclusive and at worst contradictory. Similarly, the opinions of participants of this survey indicated that accurate generalizations about the levels of homophobia within entire ethno-racial communities are impossible.”

“Being a person of colour makes me an outsider in mainstream queer communities. I haven’t been able to find a queer community that is understanding of my experience as a person of colour. I can feel as much alienated at a gay club as at a straight club.”

“The idea that is fundamentally racist is that gay people are all white. This is powerfully harmful to queer people of colour. The fact that there is racism within the mainstream GLBT organizations is undeniable.”

“In my full identity I am conscious of all aspects of who I am. I draw strength from all aspects of my identity.”

“At their root all oppressions are linked and have to be dealt with comprehensively as far as possible, though I’m not sure how one would do that.”

Calendar of Events

- Some events take more work than others.
- Sometimes the ‘side impacts’ are even greater / longer-lasting than the main impact.
- Sometimes we can make a ‘splash’ with very little effort.
- We can insert our message into ready-made events.
- We can be ‘visible’ even when we’re not invited to the party…

Challenging questions:

Why is it important for LGBT folks to participate in this event?

What is the message if we do?

What is the message if we don’t?
CAW Structure

Questions:

What if the majority of union leadership were strong LGBT allies, what concrete difference would it make?

What if more union leadership were queer, what concrete difference would it make?

Who are our likely allies?

What would it take to elect LGBT folks here (pick a few points on the diagram)?

What potential do all of our CAW positions and structures offer us?

Take it from Harvey Milk….

“All over the country, they’re reading about me, and the story doesn’t center on me being gay. It’s just about a gay person who is doing his job.”

“I have tasted freedom. I will not give up that which I have tasted. I have a lot more to drink. For that reason, the political numbers game will be played. I know the rules of their game now and how to play it.”

“It’s not my victory, it’s yours and yours and yours. If a gay can win, it means there is hope that the system can work for all minorities if we fight. We’ve given them hope.”

“People thought the pope would run the country. But after six months in office, when Kennedy started to do things, people never questioned him again. If I do a good job, people won’t care if I am green or have three heads.”
Knowledge Café’s

Topic: Action on International government-sanctioned homo/transphobia
Host: Tom Balint

Topic: Violence against the LGBT community
Host: Ruth Cameron

Topic: new CAW HIV/AIDS Education Booklet
Host: Sue Carter

Topic: Anti-gay discrimination in Blood and Organ/Tissue Donation
Hosts: Phil Vandermolen & Kim Crump

Topic: Gender Identity Human Rights Protection
Host: Billy O’Neill

Open Space

Topic: Statement on Blood / Organ / Tissue Donation
Host: Phil Vandermolen

Topic: Strategy session on strengthening gay community
Host: Ken Stuart

Topic: LGBT Committee Handbook
Host: Sue Carter

Topic: LGBT in Union Structures
Host: Billy O’Neill

Topic: Ally Cards
Host: George Tomlinson

Topic: Pride Committee Photostory
Host: Jake
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What’s the best surprise of the week so far?

Best surprise is the amount of energy and commitment people have • The relationships we’re building • The work that is being developed • Everyone’s dedication to the course to make it the best it can be • The salsa dancing – so much exercise, so little time! • The style of learning with the circle, not sitting at the tables • How comfortable I feel up here, I’m usually nervous, but not this time • How respectful the class is, we’re here for a single purpose • Re-building friendships and making new ones How we’ve evolved from the 1	extsuperscript{st} conference to now • Meeting younger people here • How much fun this is • Making new friends, building networks, the love and support in the room • The honesty and candidness to share issues; we’re more open and it’s easier to discuss • Diversity of this group • The knowledge that we have in the room, the diversity and my roommate! • The forum we’re using to get our info across – it’s powerful and it works • The number of queers in the room! • I’m enjoying myself – I hated school and I love this, and I’ve opened my brain • The feeling of belonging – I was nervous about what kind of forum it would be, but I really, really feel good about this • It doesn’t matter if we’re in class or on the patio, the conversations continue and they’re really good conversations • I was really uncomfortable, didn’t know what to expect, this is my first big gay thing …• now I think I could sit down and talk to any one of you • The energy that everyone has and the drive and the motivation - I believe we’ll be the first graduating class and I think we can stick together and keep the communication going between us • I’m not surprised by the discussion and content – I expected great things (!), but I’m surprised by how attached you can get in the space of the week •
Harvests

We accomplished so much…

A Pride Calendar (coming soon)
Photostories on standing up to gay/trans-bashing
Analysis of our events
Strategic plans
Letter to Canadian Blood Services protesting gay discrimination
Pride invite photostory for use in locals, CAW Council, etc.
Plans for Trans Remembrance Day
Draft “recipes” for LGBT events
Edits to new CAW HIV/AIDS booklet
New Caucus/Committee plans
Photostory on just how proud we are!
Visibility plans (Open Houses)
Allies & Trans booklet Distribution Plans
Weather-report
Needs assessment
Vision
Tough talks on racism
Plans for anti-bullying initiatives (May 17th, Pink Shirt Day)
Queering the Labour Day parade
Building our Movement…
Community.
Head, Heart, Feet

One thing I learned more about this week...
- HIV/AIDS
- Canadian Blood Services anti-gay discrimination
- Trans issues
- Learning to work in coalition
- Technology
- Trans issues and Trans Remembrance Day
- That I earned my first diploma
- The Importance of insistence.
- HIV/AIDS
- Trans Issues
- Need to pause, reflect, listen
- Photostories
- “Gay agenda” means equality for all
- Issues that don’t appear to be queer on the surface really can be
- Anti-gay stance of Canadian Blood Services

One thing I felt this week...
Expanded sense of community.
Love & friendship.
Encouragement.
Realized what I was missing from my community.
Keep the communication open.
Keep in contact.
Importance of positive relationships with allies and staying in contact.
Our voice, our love.
Sense of belonging.
Inspiration.
Love.
Trust – in each other and in the movement.
New friends and relationships.
New allies and friends.
Bringing emotion (passion) to our work.
Re-energized.
Loved.
Lots and lots of positive energy.
Trust – you’ve got my back
Strength and desire to ‘do the work’
Refreshed and energized to move forward.
Re-establishing old friends.
Meeting new friends.

One thing I plan to do...
Attend upcoming CLC Rise Up Conference
Expand contacts
March with Pride in the Labour Day Parade
Walk in Relay for Life
Put on CAW LGBT Dances
Identify
Toronto Labour Day (pride) parade
Support this new family
Stay proud
Be active and educate
Write for the Oshaworker
Attend more events to help us be seen
Pride events (Peel Pride)
Queering spaces
To get as much advice and help as I can
Participate in as many pride events (see calendar) as I can
Be visible at Windsor Labour Day
Promote activism and get more involved with other groups
Take action
Use google docs, make photostories
Hand out the Allies and Trans books to management at work
Pick my battles – follow them through to completion
Get local to be more active on LGBT issues
Improve – with others – our presence in London Pride
Learn some new dance steps…
True Colours

What are your most vital sources of energy?

What are you trying to do at this stage in your activism / work / life? (from a helicopter view)

Who are the three or four people that can help you?

What are your one or two first next steps?

What is holding you back?

What question will you carry forward from this week that will help you in your intentions?

What door do you need to go through today / tomorrow?