

MARILYN BYERS believes that Equality is nothing less than justice, freedom and opportunity for all. Marilyn along with Barbara & Tom Beattie are proud to be the founding members of PFLAG Canada-York Region On. (*Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, Transgendered*).

Marilyn's son "came out" to her in 1994, and this chapter was started in 1996. PFLAG's mission is to support and educate- to cope with an adverse society; to enlighten an ill-informed public; to end discrimination and to secure equal human rights. All this she does by giving workshops, presentations and speeches for corporations, churches, and clubs and frequently in high schools on "*Proud 2 B*" teaching about respectful, inclusive and supportive education. Marilyn discusses sexual orientation and gender identity and the meaning of LGBT3IQ2. Believing that *through education comes understanding and through understanding comes acceptance*, she volunteered over 1500 hours in the year 2000; 1800 hours in the years 2001, 2002 and 2003 and still continues her volunteering even to this date in 2010.

Having taught school for 30 years, she brings her expertise in raising awareness of equality for all relating her talk to Curriculum in the schools.

Marilyn is willing to travel to give a Presentation or Workshop..Full day.. using Videos and handing out many resources. (Travel and honorarium appreciated - which is shared with the youth she sometimes brings who tells his/her story of "coming out").

No honorarium request for Lunch time displays)

In an effort to spur dialogue, offer hope and gain acceptance, Marilyn was instrumental in launching the first billboard campaign in Canada with the message "*Someone You Know and Love is Gay*". In the spring of 2000, this billboard sign caused some controversy, which gave the results Marilyn aimed for: promotion of dialogue and education about the potentially violent consequences of "hate speech". An ongoing goal is to raise funds to have the billboard signs placed in other cities.

In 2004 an appeal to end homophobia Delegates attending the Human Rights Committee Caucus on building inclusive school communities heard heartfelt appeals for justice, respect and humane treatment for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and two-spirited students and their families. Marilyn Byers called on OECTA (Ontario English Catholic Teachers) and its members to find ways to nurture understanding and acceptance. "We must stop preaching love while modelling hate. Just as we reject slavery and sexism, we can bring an end to homophobia through education," Byers said. "As Christians we must stand with those who believe discrimination is a crime."

In November 2005, Marilyn obtained a Government Grant for PFLAG Canada – York Region On. This Grant of \$45,000.00 was used for Billboard signs with the message “Being Gay or Lesbian is not a crime, Bashing is” and a support group for Lesbian & Gay Victims of Crime.

July 2-3, 2009, at the OECTA Professional Development Summer Institute for Teachers, Marilyn gave a Workshop on “Inclusivity & Diversity”.

Ontario’s Equity & Inclusive Education Strategy-2009 as well as Pastoral Guidelines to assist Students of Same- Sex Orientation were referred to.

In April 2010, Marilyn was instrumental in obtaining a Grant from the Trillium Foundation of \$50,000.00. This grant will be used to raise awareness, reduce homophobia and promote respect for diversity as well as grow services and supports for community members across York Region...to obtain educational materials and help launch a publicity campaign. Also to join the gay community with local businesses.

In June 2010, Marilyn spoke at the Minister of the Attorney General’s office.

Marilyn was also on a panel discussion for Bent International, Bridging Queer Human Rights at Home and around the World.

Marilyn has received numerous awards over the past few years. They include:

“Spirit of Community Award”, November 2001 from the Municipality of York Region

“Community Service Award”, 2001 from the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto

“5 Year Ontario Volunteer Award”, 2001 from the Province of Ontario

“Certificate of Appreciation”, June 2002 from The York Region Health Services (Public Health Department) in recognition of her courage in sharing her experience to help further the vision of the elimination of discrimination and the celebration of diversity in York Region

“Certificate of Appreciation”, January 2003 from The Ontario Provincial Police College for her valued contribution to the education and training of officers attending the “2003 Anti-discrimination and Diversity Issues in Policing Forum”

2004 “Outstanding Achievement Award” for Voluntarism in Ontario from the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. (20 finalists out of 250 chosen)

Marilyn is a board member of PFLAG Canada and PFLAG Canada – York Region

See www.pflagyork.ca for info re- PFLAG Canada- York Region.

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2/2

Rev. 2010