

Challenges and celebrations experienced by LGBTQ+ in focus at Library



By Brock Weir

Pride Month has come and gone for another year, but there is still plenty of celebration to be had for York Region's LGBTQ+ community.

But challenges come with the territory as well, and both will be in focus this week as the Aurora Public Library opens its doors for LGBTQ+ In Conversation.

The Library will be the scene of an evening of intimate conversation with local activists and community leaders who will be addressing the challenges and celebrations experienced by the LGBTQ+ community here at home, including issues of culture, diversity and inclusion.

Hosted by this writer, the evening is part of the Aurora Public Library's One Book One Aurora program, which this year aims to get all of Aurora reading from *Natural Order*, the latest novel from Toronto writer Brian Francis.

Natural Order centres on a woman nearing the end of her life grappling with a difficult decision she made in her past rejecting her gay son.

Using this book as a springboard, the Library has taken the themes within the book to weave a full calendar of programming.

Wednesday night's conversation stems not only from the book but also from focus groups held earlier this year seeking input on how the Aurora Public Library can better address the needs of the LGBTQ community.

According to Reccia Mandelcorn, the Library's Manager of Community Collaboration, many of the adults and youth who participated in their demographic-specific focus groups had many questions they were hoping their library could address, from health to legal, and this conversation was the perfect venue to foster these important topics.

Among the participants is Chelsea Derry, from PFLAG York Region.

PFLAG was founded over 40 years ago as Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Since its inception, it has spread across North America and engages in advocacy at local, provincial and Federal levels on a variety of issues facing the community.

"When I looked at the topics we had at our focus groups, we had people saying they wanted information on how to come out to their parents, so we have Chelsea Derry from PFLAG," says Ms. Mandelcorn. "We also had people asking about health and it happens that in her other life Chelsea happens to be a health practitioner."

Attendees also had questions about surrogacy and marriage, so lawyer Niki Fragiadakis from the Lisa Feldstein Law Office will be on hand to field these questions. This law firm was founded from the "realization that families need health law advice."

The marriage aspect will also be considered through the lens of Jennifer Tyrell, another lawyer who is set to marry her fiancée just a couple of weeks after the event.

The conversation will be complete with Jacob Gal, "the energy behind York Pride" who will share his insights on advocacy from a different angle.

"He is very young and works with teens in a very positive and joyous way," says Ms. Mandelcorn. "He will be able to talk about celebrating your identity in a very York Region-specific way."

Throughout the evening, information tables will be set up providing a space for community groups ranging from PFLAG, to York

Pride Fest, to the AIDS Committee of York Region, My Rainbow Resources, the York Region Rainbow Umbrella, and various student groups to interact with attendees and share information.

"I want everybody to come out on Wednesday, September 20 from 7 ? 8.30," says Ms. Mandelcorn. "It is for the entire community. It is not only if you are LGBTQ and want questions answered and want to participate, but I don't think there is anybody not touched by people who are along the gender spectrum and I think we all need to be educated on how to work with different aspects of our community and how our own lives and identities can be enriched.

"It is very much a community discussion. You will learn so much, be able to network, and take home information."

Tickets for In Conversation: LGBTQ+ Culture, Diversity and Inclusion are free, but space is limited. To register, visit onebookoneaurora.com. The Conversation begins Wednesday, September 20 at 7 p.m. in the Library's Magna Room.