

Study will create life-saving programs and policies for Trans residents



By Brock Weir

Every year, the list of names of trans people murdered across the globe grows.

This is a sobering statistic and one that helps fuel the work of Dr. Alex Abramovich, who received an Advocacy Award from York Regional Police in Aurora last week for his ground-breaking work and fight for policy reform for 2SLGBTQ+ youth homelessness. Presented last Tuesday on the Transgender Day of Remembrance, one didn't have to look far for evidence of this sad stat. At last year's ceremony to mark the occasion, the York Regional Police (YRP), welcomed a speaker who spoke about her own very personal experiences.

Less than 12 months later, this advocate for the Trans community took her own life.

Accepting the Advocacy Award from the YRP, Dr. Abramovich said the award had special meaning for them as it was presented on a day dedicated to remembering trans people who have taken their own lives or been killed due to transphobic hatred but, they added, it is also important to honour and celebrate the lives of trans people who are still living.

"I appreciate and accept this recognition on behalf of all the trans people who have also worked so hard to make this world a more inclusive and safe place," said Dr. Abramovich before a crowd of advocates, community leaders, dignitaries and local police.

"Sadly, the fight for trans rights is far from over. Every year the list of names of trans people murdered across the world grows. This year the list is longer than last year and significantly longer than the year before. However, there is no way of knowing exactly how many trans people have been killed each year and this is due to major underreporting and trans people being mis-gendered and not being recognized for who they are. We know that trans women of colour are disproportionately represented and that they face extremely high rates of violence, discrimination and murder."

Outlining their ongoing study on York Region youth homelessness, they added, "I work with some of the most marginalized young people and they are also some of the most resilient and brave people I have ever met. My hope is my colleague and I will speak to as many [youth] as possible and collect data that will help support the development of lifesaving policies and programs, something we very much need here in York Region."

Underscoring the importance of Dr. Abramovich's work was Benjamin Debbert.

A resident of Durham Region, Benjamin shared a very personal experience of being a homeless youth after coming out to their family as transgender. After beginning counselling, Benjamin was in a shelter. While some people find the shelter experience particularly challenging, they said it was "amazing" and, through the experience, they met some of their best friends.

"I was homeless, that is not fun. I didn't have a job, but I had finally people who supported me and that was huge," said Benjamin, who is now a childcare worker for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Durham Region. "I still talk to the shelter people and that was three years ago. They helped me through my toughest times and I don't know where I would be without them. Flash forward to now, I live with my roommate. I have three cats because I am crazy. I have an amazing job. I never thought working with kids was going to happen for me once I came out because not only is it so different working with kids when you're female as opposed to male. I find that males who go into child care are less likely to get hired because they are male and because people think it is creepy when it is

not, but also the fact I am trans.

?When I got my job with the Boys and Girls Clubs, I said I was never leaving. My kids are amazing. They all know I am trans because my niece is in the program and she likes to out me. She's seven, it's fine. They all know. None of them care. Their parents know. None of them care because we do a good job and we take care of their kids and that's all that matters. This is not something I ever thought I was going to have when I came out. I thought I was homeless, that was going to be it, life was going to be hard and life was going to be over. But here I am.?