

OutSaskatoon - Saskatchewan's Hidden Gem

This excerpt comes directly from www.outsaskatoon.ca

Throughout their history OUTSaskatoon has had multiple locations and name-changes, but their goal has always stayed the same: to tirelessly work toward increasing the acceptance and visibility of Saskatchewan's 2SLGBTQ people. We do this through reaching new and varied community partners, businesses, and organizations in the provision of support services, education, housing, events, and programming. In all that we do, we work to improve the lives of the 2SLGBTQ community.

OUTSaskatoon began as Gay & Lesbian Health Services (GLHS) in 1991. By the will and the way of Dr. Sheri McConnell and Gens Hellquist, GLHS was created to address the mental, social, emotional, and physical health needs of gay men and lesbians in Saskatchewan. GLHS's first two employees worked half-time and offered a peer support phone line, educational information and resources, and facilitated a variety of support/social groups, all of which remain important elements of our programming today.

In 2005, GLHS changed its name to The Avenue Community Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity in order to better reflect the wide communities that it served, and in homage to its location in the Avenue Building on 3rd Avenue. In 2008, a relocation to 21st St West in Riversdale, offered a much larger space for offices, drop-in, and group meetings, to better serve the growing number of people accessing services, as well as a growing staff. Over the next seven years, The Avenue Community Centre worked to support the 2SLGBTQ community through increased education services, the addition of a sexual health clinic, a responsive and expanding list of social support groups, and an increased public presence in the province.

In April 2015, the board of directors elected to change the name of the centre to OUTSaskatoon in order to increase visibility and take a brave step "OUT" into the larger community. Around the same time, OUTSaskatoon started to look into housing needs for 2SLGBTQ and ultimately opened Pride Home in January 2017. Pride Home houses up to six 2SLGBTQ youth ages 16-21 and provides a supported independent living through a holistic, youth-centred philosophy. Over the years, OUTSaskatoon expanded to the entire top floor of the Habitat for Humanity building to support thousands of people who use our drop-in services, access our social and support groups, and receive education and

diversity training. With all of this growth, we relocated to 213 Ave C S in August of 2019. Just a short 140 meters away, the new location is double the size and street front for the very first time in OUTSaskatoon's history.

Southwest Saskatchewan Pride has often turned to OUTSaskatoon for resources, advice, and planning. As they are the longest serving Queer organization in Saskatchewan, they also have human resources that are leaders in the province with regard to advocacy and visibility.

In 2016, OUTSaskatoon pioneered the annual provincial GSA Summit. This event brings GSA/QSA youth from across the province, together with Advisor leaders and teachers. Informative and interactive sessions are offered for both youth and adults, while building community connections. Different cities across the province have hosted this event, a practice that creates partnerships at each venue. The Summit generally has a keynote speaker/performer, and winds up with a gala dance event.

With an Education coordinator, OUTSaskatoon has the capacity to visit schools, businesses, and organizations to help educate and inform school, office, and business personnel about a variety of things from Diversity Training and Queer Inclusion to Professional Development.

Spend an afternoon diving into the resources online at www.outsaskatoon.ca. There are pages that deal with healthcare, counselling, and even housing, all through a queer lens. Links to documents and literature resources provide a wealth of information that is categorized for the end user, whether it be educators, youth, or family members.

Time spent on the website, at the Centre, or in conversation with staff, is time well-spent. They are informed, dedicated, and passionate about their role and purpose. If you are just starting your journey, or well on your way, check them out. You will not regret it!