

Caledon Pride focused on connecting organizations and youth

By Rob Paul

It might not be the same social in-person setting dedicated to spreading awareness, education, and showing the support most associate with Pride, but this year Caledon Pride is hoping to do the most they can given the circumstance of the pandemic.

With the recent retirement of Peel Pride, Caledon Pride led by founder Julia Bertola is helping as many of the organizations in the area that they can get ready for June. Caledon Pride is a grassroots 2SLGBTQ+ advocacy group that's dedicated to creating an inclusive community for all in Caledon by working with local organizations to bring programming to the community and promote 2SLGBTQ+ advocacy year-round.

This year, Pride in Caledon will begin with a flag raising ceremony that will be filmed for social media and the Youth Activists Inc. website with different speakers like Mayor Allan Thompson and representatives from the community like Bertola.

The last thing Peel Pride did before they retired was donate rainbow benches to Mississauga, Brampton, and Caledon, Bertola said. We're going to be unveiling the new one in Caledon in the video and our social media will be updated with all the different details. It's just a little kickoff, but it's so important we show that the Town supports it.

What we're specifically doing is the Peel Pride Fundraiser. We did it last year and we think it's a really great way to give back to the community. It's a month-long fundraiser that we promote every week to raise money for LGBT Youth Line. We chose an organization that can be easily accessed in Caledon and to raise awareness for residents that there is this support. Usually, people in Caledon have to go to Brampton or Mississauga to get programming, but this allows them to connect through text and phone. We're also going to be interviewing LGBTQ people from the Caledon area to get their stories.

One of the organizations we're partnering with is called Eclipse Youth Centre and they've really been supporting the youth community throughout COVID. They'll be running four events and their youth group, Prism, is an LGBTQ youth group for ages 14 to 20 to meet people, discuss issues, and empower and educate. We're going to be attending all four events, but we'll also be running one with them. On June 14, we'll be running a games night with them where people can play through their phone, and we'll have a giveaway. It's a little different from the usual education stuff we do and more about hanging out and having a good time.

Without the ability to interact in person and host events, Caledon Pride has found the best way to help in the community is to work with and guide organizations and connect them with the 2SLGBTQ+ community in Caledon.

For Pride, Caledon Pride and our partners Youth Activist Inc. have been reaching out to local organizations to basically see what they're interested in doing and supporting them in whatever they need help with brainstorming, executing, advertisement that's kind of what we've been mostly doing due to COVID, said Bertola. Before COVID, we were more of a social group, but during COVID we've been more of a Pride committee and planning group. We already have a lot of great organizations that are already doing things for Pride, and we just wanted to help everybody connect with each other.

We're a small group and there's so many different organizations that are already running programs and have the funds, but a lot of community organizers aren't as connected as you may think. So instead of us coming in to try and reinvent the wheel, we're promoting established organizations and helping them connect. That's one of the main issues across Peel, is that LGBTQ groups are a little too widespread and we don't know what everybody is doing for Pride. This is a way for us to connect the community partners that have plans for Pride and then figure out what they're doing and support them where we can and create a cohesive Pride calendar.

In just their second year, Caledon Pride has found a way to make a bigger impact by being that voice in the middle that can connect youth in the community to some of the local organizations that are providing them with safe spaces and programs that promote

inclusivity.

?Last year was our first Pride month ever as Caledon Pride,? Bertola said. ?At that point we had started doing safe space youth nights but then when COVID hit everything stalled. Then we were contacted to do something for Pride, and we didn't want to organize anything in person, so we started looking around and found there's so many organizations that were struggling to pivot online. That's when we had the idea that we'd rather support these funded programs and bring people to them. If everything is too widespread then you have people going to your event and people going to another, but both programs closed down because they don't have enough of an audience.

?The online route for Caledon Pride as an advocate has been working really well. We still have a lot of issues with social isolation in Caledon?I've had a lot of people reaching out to me, most of them youth feeling stuck because they can't see people and they don't know about some of the community groups doing stuff. I would love to do in-person stuff, but for Caledon Pride specifically, I think supporting other organizations and connecting these people to them is the best route for us. We're really trying to advocate for organizations like the Town of Caledon, Caledon Library, and Caledon Community Services to have more LGBTQ resources and more access to specialists.

?We wouldn't be able to do that if we were focused on hosting our own stuff and taking people away from their audience. It's so much more reliable to use their resources to bring people to them. One of the biggest issues as a community organizer is that not a lot of people are connected. For example, people don't even know what's going on in Orangeville, Orangeville has a huge LGBTQ group and do awesome events and they even have an LGBTQ specific campground. Young adults struggle to find these organizations and aren't necessarily aware of what's available to them.?

For more information on Caledon Pride and for details on their Pride Month plans, visit youthactivists.ca/caledon-pride. For information on Caledon Public Library's Pride Month plans, visit caledon.library.on.ca/celebrate-pride.