

## **For Immediate Release**

### **KW Counselling Services receives grant from RBC Foundation to provide counselling to LGBTQ+ people in Waterloo Region.**

In 2005, KW Counselling Services launched its OK2BME program, a set of free, confidential services for people wondering about their sexuality or gender identity. Services include: LGBTQ-positive individual, couple and family counselling, LGBTQ+ social and recreational youth group, professional consultation and collaboration, public education and training, and supporting establishment and maintenance of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in local schools.

Since that time, the agency has only seen the need for these services grow. “The need and risk in the Rainbow Community is unparalleled in other populations and is a direct result of homo-, bi- and transphobia,” says Leslie Josling, Executive Director of KW Counselling Services. “Our counselling helps these folks with issues around coming out and gender or sexual diversity but we also know the local Rainbow Community reports experiencing higher levels of mental illness and addictions including suicide. We see a growing need for counselling services for LGBTQ+ people that is clearly related to the current political climate. Our clients tell us that they are deeply concerned by events facing LGBTQ+ people in the United States and by the horrific stories of gay men being detained and tortured in Chechnya. The global human rights climate has left the Rainbow community feeling unsafe.”

OK2BME services are funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and by short-term grants as they become available. Other funders include the Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation and the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The newest grant of \$50,000 from the RBC Foundation will allow the agency to offer free counselling to LGBTQ+ people aged 19-29 over the next two years. Since 2013, the RBC Foundation has supported KW Counselling Services with short-term grants that have been used to help provide counselling to this population.

“With the growing numbers of LGBTQ+ families and growing acceptance of same-sex couples, you would think coming out would be a lot easier than it was fifty years ago. But this is not the case,” said Massimo Iacurti, Regional Vice President of Kitchener Waterloo Perth, RBC. “RBC is proud to provide \$50,000 in funding to extend OK2BME services to young adults who are faced with the challenges of figuring out who they are and where they fit. That’s a lot for anyone to handle!”

“We are extremely grateful for the support of the RBC Foundation and our other funders,” says Leslie Josling, Executive Director of KW Counselling Services. “The RBC Foundation’s commitment to diversity and inclusion is inspiring and their financial support is greatly needed.”

The \$50,000 grant includes some funds that are earmarked for OK2BME Public Education. “Since 2005 OK2BME has been a leader in building Waterloo Region’s community capacity to

meet the needs young people identifying as LGBTQ+,” says Josling. “We reach out and respond to requests for public education and training from businesses and community partners who support young adults (colleges, three area universities, mental health agencies, developmental services, young adult work placement initiatives, etc.) with presentations that address homophobia and create an inclusive community.” Last year the agency trained approximately 6000 people on LGBTQ+ issues.

“We know from our clients that our work is making a difference,” says Washington Silk, a therapeutic counsellor and the Coordinator of the OK2BME program. “Our counselling clients tell us that they are happier and healthier after working with us. Our public education efforts are the best way we can combat homo-, bi- and transphobia. This work will result in a community where LGBTQ+ folks experience less oppression and discrimination based on their sexual or gender identity.”

LGBTQ+ people who are interested in counselling can visit [www.ok2bme.ca](http://www.ok2bme.ca) to complete an online intake form or call 519.884.0000 x222.

### **About KW Counselling Services**

KW Counselling Services is a multi-service agency offering counselling supports to individuals, couples and families in the Waterloo Region. In addition to our counselling work we offer a variety of parenting education workshops, leadership training for members of the multicultural community and outreach support for low-income families, newcomers to Canada and the LGBTQ+ community. We are proud to have been supporting children, youth and families in this community since 1950.

### **About RBC**

Royal Bank of Canada is Canada’s largest bank, and one of the largest banks in the world, based on market capitalization. We are one of North America’s leading diversified financial services companies, and provide personal and commercial banking, wealth management, insurance, investor services and capital markets products and services on a global basis. We have over 80,000 full- and part-time employees who serve more than 16 million personal, business, public sector and institutional clients through offices in Canada, the U.S. and 36 other countries. For more information, please visit [rbc.com <http://www.rbc.com>](http://www.rbc.com) .†

RBC helps communities prosper, supporting a broad range of community initiatives through donations, community investments, sponsorships and employee volunteer activities. In 2016, we contributed more than \$121 million to causes around the world.

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