



QMUNITY

B.C.S. QUEER, TRANS, AND TWO-SPIRIT RESOURCE CENTRE

Annual Report
2019

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Message from the Interim Executive Director

Tim Agg was appointed Interim Executive Director in late October of 2019, towards the end of a crisis year for QMUNITY. He had previously retired as the executive director of a non-profit social services agency. The following summarizes his assessment of that crisis, the steps taken to recover, the events in early 2020, and the path ahead.

I joined QMUNITY on short notice, and found an organization in crisis.

I have old history with QMUNITY, having chaired the board for three years in the 1980's, when it was then the Vancouver Gay & Lesbian Community Centre Society. I signed the original lease on our Bute Street offices. In that era, all work was done by volunteers; strong commitment and frequent argument propelled us along.

That is now over 40 years of effort by the LGBTQ2S+ community to create for ourselves a safe and healthy space, deliver services, support our peers, and advance our rights. Looking back across that history, we see wins and setbacks, we see external threats and internal fights, we see moments of anguish along with celebrations of progress. Our development as an organization has never been smooth, more typically

challenging and erratic. Fortunately, we have become resilient.

The 2018 annual report showed an organization that was creative, productive, making real differences in many lives, and enjoying strong community support. 2019 started out in similar fashion.

At the same time, a variety of circumstances over several years were creating structural weakness. There was frequent leadership turnover, with a succession of regular and interim executive directors, resulting in inconsistent attention to many aspects of service delivery, human resources and infrastructure. Staff turnover was also very high. And perhaps QMUNITY's external success obscured growing internal tension and conflict. By June of 2019, a grievance resulted in the board appointing an independent investigator. There were staff and board departures, and program delivery was impacted.

I arrived to find the staff at half strength, the board also at half strength, no management and all programs temporarily closed. Legal reasons preclude a more detailed review.

The board asked me first, to help get QMUNITY services re-opened; and second, to help the organization build a sustainable service delivery, human resource, leadership and financial model to ensure stability and strength. I'm pleased to provide you with a brief update on what we have done and what the next year looks like.

Staff, board and volunteers have devoted significant time and effort to address QMUNITY's challenges. The accomplishments we are now seeing are the result of their determination.

Over the winter, we began a detailed review of services, jobs and policies; this work continues. Changes were made to job descriptions, and to the management structure. Improvements to board/staff communication are underway. We hired several new staff. We brought back volunteers, began to recruit new ones and reopened our information and referral services. We are almost at full strength.

The board has also undertaken an active recruitment process, with four new members joining so far

We were in the process of reopening all services when COVID-19 hit us. We closed the office to walk-ins and ceased all group programming. Instead of providing thorough orientation to the new staff, everyone began to work from home and provided services remotely. Peer support groups began to run virtual meetings. Zoom became our friend!

Fortunately, our government funded services are included in what the BC Government determined to be essential social services during the pandemic – that is, while following the instructions of Dr. Henry, we were asked to adapt and continue service delivery as best we can. This ensured that we could keep supporting people at this very difficult time; and it signals that the province understands the importance of our work.

Despite losing the capacity for in-person programming, youth, seniors and counselling services have continued, and are growing; information and referral services are slowly expanding as volunteers prepare to return.

Our education and training department typically slows down significantly

during the summer months as workshop demand slows. With this in mind, education and training staff are re-evaluating and strategizing about the efficiency and impact of ‘cultural competency’ workshops and reimagining how QMUNITY can posit itself as a cultural thought leader on matters of human rights and social justice, and how best to leverage education to accomplish our mission and vision.

What now? The first steps towards restoration of full, in-person services are underway, following guidance from WorkSafe BC and the Provincial Health Officer. Some programming will remain virtual, as we learn the possibilities of the technology. We have lots of ideas for enhanced and new services.

We are working towards long term organizational stability. It will result in the development of a five-year strategic plan, with the process set to begin in the fall of 2020. Some of the key measures include:

- Updating governance policy, including the board’s role, leadership models and transition strategies, board/staff communication, and conflict transformation.
- Creating a new human resources policy framework, with particular attention to an “attract, develop and retain” strategy while celebrating and collaborating with unionized staff, and recognizing the contributions labour rights and labour movements have had on social justice movements; sustaining a respectful and safe organizational culture; ensuring that QMUNITY is a safe and desirable workplace for Two-Spirit

people, people of colour and trans people; and maintaining a positive and effective working relationship with the Union.

- Program and service development - We are increasingly a provincial organization, and need to improve our capacity to support individuals and groups outside Metro Vancouver. There is much work ahead to plan the programming and services that will be possible in our new building, with triple the space we have now. We are exploring what virtual programming should be incorporated into ongoing services. We are beginning to talk with the peer support groups about how we can provide better, more consistent support. We are starting the conversations about how we can become a stronger anti-racist, de-colonial organization and how we can better ally ourselves with Two-Spirit and Queer Indigenous people.
- Fundraising - We have had lucky breaks during the pandemic: Our government funded services remained stable. We have received new funding from the Vancouver Foundation and a gift of tablets from Telus. However, cancelling events creates a significant shortfall. We urgently need to increase revenue in order to provide stability and healthy growth.
- Administration – some of our systems appear to have evolved over time without attention to updating and streamlining.
- Building - in three years we will join with McLaren Housing Society in opening the new building on the northeast corner of

Burrard and Davie. Detailed plans for the space lie ahead.

As a newcomer, I have to say that QMUNITY is privileged to have people on the staff and board with commitment, energy and talent – and who are a pleasure to work with. We have a formidable agenda. We also have what it takes to achieve it. For over forty years, QMUNITY has been resilient, dedicated to the LGBTQ2S+ communities. We stand with you, we ask that you continue to stand with us.

Tim Agg (he/him)

Interim Executive Director
QMUNITY
