

The Rainbow Elders Calgary (REC) have been fortunate to be invited to many different events around the community. One event we were very pleased to attend was the 8th Annual GSA Conference at the Nelson Mandela High School. The Centre for Sexuality hosted the event this year. At our session, someone asked the panel what they could do to be our ally. This was not the first time this has been asked of us. So I thought I might try to explain this “new” term.

When we were at the Chow & Chatter luncheon at Carya East, I tried to explain how to be an ally to the East Village Seniors. One way I described it was to compare it to GSA’s (gay straight alliances). They have them in many junior and senior high schools in Alberta. These are clubs that youth and their peers; gay and straight kids alike meet in a safe, welcoming space. They meet to support each other no matter what their sexual orientation. It doesn’t matter to them, they are just there to share and validate each other.

Recently, I also had the opportunity to go to a LGBT 101 & Allyship training at the Arts Commons. James Demers of the Calgary Queer Arts Society was able to give insight into understanding culture, gender and sexuality. The presentation gave many pointers on how to be an ally.

“**Ally** is a verb, not a noun. Allyship is about continuous work and lifelong learning.”

These tips are from Amnesty International on how to be a LGBT ally:

- Listen to LGBT voices
- Be willing to talk
- Be open-minded
- Confront your own prejudices and challenge your own conceptions about gender-appropriate roles and behaviors
- Don't assume that all your friends and co-workers are straight
- Speak out against statements and jokes that attack LGBT people
- Defend your LGBT friends against discrimination
- Use non-gender specific language
- Don't make assumptions about sexual orientation
- Learn about the diversity of gender and sexuality
- Learn about LGBT inequality and policy Issues
- Educate yourself about LGBT histories, cultures, and concerns
- Support Ally programs or LGBT organizations of your university or workplace

Remember that you will make mistakes and that’s ok. Supporting the LGBT community is not an easy process. It takes time and commitment to relearn from your assumptions. Sometimes it is easier to say you are an ally but difficult on **being** an ally. Anyone has the capability to be an ally. An ally recognizes the hardship of a marginalized group and makes an effort to understand their struggle.

For more information on the Rainbow Elders Calgary (REC) visit our website at rainbowelderscalgary.ca or you can find us on Facebook. Or drop us a line at rainboweldercalgary@gmail.com. We would love to hear from you.