

Why We Need a Rainbow Crosswalk

By Frank Emanuele

As a director of Strathroy Pride, it gives me immense pleasure to announce the installation of Strathroy's very own Rainbow Crosswalk, located on the corner of Frank and Centre Streets. This beautiful and vibrant display is a symbol of inclusion and diversity in Strathroy. While many of our town's leaders and residents intuitively understand the significance behind the crosswalk, I would like to take a moment to explain why a Rainbow Crosswalk is essential in our quaint and lovely rural town.

According to Statistics Canada, hate crimes are on the rise across the country, with the largest increase seen in Southwestern Ontario. The top three targets for hate crimes are race/ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. Ten percent of reported hate crimes targeted people based on sexual orientation. This jarring statistic comes as no surprise to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, as most of us have either witnessed, or been victims of, offensive slurs, verbal, and/or physical assault. According to the Rainbow Alliance of SDCI, these statistics are also reflected in our own high schools through bullying and verbal abuse.

While the Rainbow Crosswalk will not solve this multi-layered problem, it is a step in the right direction. The crosswalk sends a clear message to our most vulnerable population that the greater community DOES care and support them. The colours of the rainbow are meant to represent ALL community members, together and united.

The Rainbow Crosswalk is also a catalyst to help people start conversations about acceptance, love, and inclusion. It is a vibrant



Strathroy's Rainbow Crosswalk located on the corner of Frank and Centre Streets

reminder to families to teach kids about celebrating our differences and respecting others. It is meant to bring the community together and Strathroy has done just that.

The outpouring of positivity and support has been joyous and overwhelming. When funds were needed to pay for the crosswalk, the community responded. Over \$770 in donations came in from individual community members. The rest was covered by businesses and organizations that see the value of a diverse and inclusive community. We'd like to thank Violet's of Strathroy, Muggs Coffeebar & Clay Room, the Strathroy Family Health Organization, and local realtors Dan Kiekens and Nicole Miller for their generosity and support.

On a personal level, I am proud to raise my kids in this community. My children will grow up knowing that they are safe, valued, and respected. They will feel supported in celebrating their differences and know that other families like ours are welcomed here in Strathroy. Let's all strive toward making Strathroy a safe and inclusive community for everyone to enjoy, as my family does.