



# NIAGARA PRIDE, INC.

2020 ANNUAL REVIEW



# ABOUT US

The mission of Niagara Pride is to:

1. Promote visibility of the LGBTQ+ community throughout Niagara County of New York State;
2. Create safe and welcoming events and meetings for LGBTQ+ individuals, families, and allies, in order to allow for positive socialization that is free of bullying, harassment, and of any negative stigma associated with identifying and being a member of the LGBTQ+ community;
3. Create community partnerships with local organizations to promote the enhancement of mental, physical, social, and overall holistic wellbeing of LGBTQ+ individuals in Niagara County and the surrounding areas;
4. Engage in community service and charitable programming designed to promote our mission and help others in the community;
5. Create community based educational programming aimed at increasing awareness of LGBTQ+ issues and eliminating discrimination

## ***OUR VISION***

Niagara Pride envisions an LGBTQ+ community in which individuals and families feel safe, secure, and affirmed where they live, work, worship, and play, especially in the Niagara County and surrounding areas. NP strives to be an integrated part of the social fabric of Niagara County.

## ***OUR CORE VALUES***

**Courage, Empathy, Diversity, Equality, Partnership, Community, Awareness**

**President**

Ronald Piaseczny

**Treasurer**

Brian Strickland

**Secretary**

Justin DeCleene

**At-Large Board Members**

Rev Susan Frawley

Jean Hopkins

Mark Smith

**Proprietary and Confidential**

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# A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings Niagara Pride Members, Friends, and Family...

I would like to start off by thanking all of you. In October 2020, our group, Niagara County Pride, separated from the Pride Center of WNY and incorporated as Niagara Pride. It was because of the support and encouragement from all of you, that gave us the courage to move forward with this decision. Although our name has changed, we continue with our core mission, to serve LGBTQ+ individuals and families in Niagara County and the surrounding areas.

Building on the successful programming we had in 2019, Niagara Pride was ready to bring several new programs and events to Niagara County, including a 3-day Pride Celebration in June 2020. However, COVID-19 forced not just us, but many of our community partners and businesses to halt planning and rethink how we were going to serve our community. In-person meetings quickly became Zoom online meetings. Street parties for Pride quickly had to be reimaged as online virtual Pride events. We expanded our social media presence to maintain connections to our members. But the biggest change we noticed was that the needs of the LGBTQ+ community grew, as folks began to lose employment, children had to begin in-home learning, and families were struggling.

Niagara Pride adapted by partnering with local businesses and agencies to try to help meet some of those needs. 2020 saw Niagara Pride hold our first ever School Supply Drive, benefiting local LGBTQ+ youth at various schools throughout Niagara County. Our Thanksgiving Community Meal was converted to a multi-week food drive, with businesses like Busy Bee Bookstore in Lockport, NY partnering with us to provide a donation drop off location and fundraiser event. Thanks to the generosity of WNYers, we collected enough hats, scarves, mittens, and personal care items to benefit two separate homeless LGBTQ+ youth agencies (Pinnacle Community Services and The Ali Forney Center).

Although we socially distanced as individuals, in 2020, Niagara Pride grew its network of community partnerships. Thanks to connections with agencies such as the Salvation Army of Niagara Falls, we were able to donate toys to LGBTQ+ youth and families in need in holiday season. Niagara Pride partnered with Art Park for their Taylor Mac Holiday Performance, with proceeds benefiting local LGBTQ+ agencies. We look forward to working with more agencies in 2021 to better serve the needs of our local community. As the year comes to an end, we are hopeful that 2021 will be an opportunity to reconnect with one another, build on successful projects and programming we had, forge new partnerships, and use the lessons we learned in 2020 to strengthen Niagara Pride's resolve to promote kindness, compassion, love, understanding, and to leave the world a little better than how we found it.

Thank you again for joining us in 2020, participating in our drives, Zooming with us, following us on social media. We wish you a very happy, safe, and love filled holiday season.

Ronald Piaseczny JD, LMHC  
President of Niagara Pride, Inc.



# THIS YEAR

## SOCIAL & SUPPORT SERVICES

NP Eat OUT! - Once a month we try to hold a social gathering at a local restaurant to socialize and share a meal. In February, we met at Aguacates Mexican Restaurant. We had plans to visit the New York Beer Project in March, Dockside Restaurant in April, & the Red Coach Inn during May but those plans were cancelled due to COVID.



### AWARDS

- Ron received 2020 Honoree Award at the Growing LGBTQ+ Youth Support (GLYS) Gala



### LETTER OF REFERENCE

- Provided GLYS with a letter of reference for a grant they were applying for in Oct

Monthly Social Meetings – We were only able to have two of our regularly scheduled monthly social meetings at the Duke Center due to COVID. We hosted a Game Night on January 9<sup>th</sup> and a Valentine’s Party on February 13<sup>th</sup>. We had pizza and refreshments at both meetings. Our Valentine’s Party consisted of a potluck meal and holiday-related games such as “Cupid’s Shooting Gallery” & “Spin The Tail On The Love Unicorn”. We held virtual meetings April 9<sup>th</sup>, May 14<sup>th</sup>, June 11<sup>th</sup>, July 9<sup>th</sup>, & August 13<sup>th</sup>. Some notable meetings include a guest speaker from Planned Parenthood in May and a Gay BINGO night in July that included prizes of gay themed shirts, fans, & flags that were mailed to the winners.

Support Meetings – For 2020 we planned on holding a second set of monthly meetings that ran in parallel to our regularly scheduled social meetings. These meetings were to follow a more formal structure and act as a support group for any local LGBTQ member that was struggling. We held the first meeting in February at the Lockport Public Library. Due to COVID, we transitioned subsequent meetings online for the months of March, April, May, & June until the virtual group dissolved most likely due to screen fatigue and summer weather.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Pride Flag raisings were held in the City of Niagara Falls & Lockport on June 1<sup>st</sup> and June 29<sup>th</sup>, respectively. Additionally, Niagara Falls was illuminated in rainbow colors on June 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> from 9:30 to 10:30 PM each night.

We asked any of our LGBTQ or ally members to submit a 2 to 3 minute video telling us what “Pride” means to them. We then posted the videos on our Facebook and YouTube pages throughout the month of June. We started with a message from Niagara Falls’ Mayor Restaino on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, followed by videos from various members and community leaders, concluding with a montage of Pride Flag raisings that happened across our community set to a dramatic reading of Maya Angelou’s poem “Still I Rise”.

We held a Virtual Scavenger Hunt during June 14<sup>th</sup> through June 20<sup>th</sup>. Participants took “selfies” in front of local landmarks while holding a rainbow item and were to always practice social distancing and wear masks in public. The list of landmarks was released in the form of riddles that participants needed to solve. Upon completion, participants submitted their photos via e-mail. Two Niagara Falls Discovery Passes with a \$75 Tops Gift Card, a \$50 Tops Gift Card, & a \$25 Tops Gift Card were first, second, & third place prizes, respectively.

Niagara Pride held a school supply drive we called “Be a Hero to a Kid in Need”. Two collection sites were held: August 23<sup>rd</sup> from 10 am to noon at Hyde Park near the Veterans Memorial & August 30<sup>th</sup> from 10 am to noon on Canal St in Lockport next to Lake Effect Ice Cream. Destination Niagara provided masks, supplies, and a monetary donation which purchased 40 large bottles of hand sanitizer. North Tonawanda Middle School received 16 filled backpacks, reusable masks, bottles of hand sanitizer, and other school supplies. Niagara Wheatfield High School received 16 filled backpacks. The Connection in Niagara Falls & Starpoint High School in Lockport each received 20 filled backpacks. Overall, we were able to help over 90 needy LGBTQ youth and families in all of Niagara County.

SummerFest Super Cruise took to the roads of Niagara County to benefit the Niagara Falls Firefighter's Christmas Toy Fund on August 23<sup>rd</sup>. About 170 bikes and vehicles participated in the event. We had a vehicle dawning our Niagara Pride Flag in the vehicular procession.

Niagara Pride was thrilled to participate in this year’s Spirit Halloween Drive Up Event in Niagara Falls on October 23<sup>rd</sup> at the Niagara Arts & Cultural Center (NACC). We helped distribute candy and apples to about 150 children.

On November 7<sup>th</sup>, a Food Drive and Fundraiser was held at Busy Bee Bookstore. 50% of sales were donated to Niagara Pride while nonperishables were collected. The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Niagara Falls also held collections during their first three Sunday services in November. Approximately 120 pounds of food was donated to the Heart, Love, & Soul Food Pantry.

We held a LGBTQ+ Youth Letter Writing Campaign. Thirty-five letters were collected and distributed to three local pediatric psychiatric hospitals: Bry Lin Hospital, Children's Psychiatric Center (Amherst & West Seneca).

On December 5<sup>th</sup> we had our Third Annual Winter Apparel Drive to Benefit Homeless LGBTQ+ Youth. We collected: 89 hats, 64 scarves, 56 pairs of gloves, 72 pairs of socks, 8 jackets, & a plethora of personal care items (toothbrushes, toothpaste, antibiotic ointments, pain relievers, sinus medication, etc.). We distributed collected items to Pinnacle Community Services in Niagara County & the Ali Forney Center in NYC.

We invited parents who are part of our Facebook group to email “Santa” to get a handwritten response sent to their child. Five letters were completed.

Niagara Pride joined Art Park on December 12<sup>th</sup> at the virtual after party of the Taylor Mac Holiday Sauce Pandemic! performance. The show was a blend of music, film, burlesque, & random acts of fabulousness. The VIP after party celebrated the LGBTQ community and honored Ari Moore, Buffalo’s first prominently out Black trans women who served as an officer with the Buffalo Police Department for 25 years. Proceeds collected benefited Artpark, Pride Center of Western New York, & Niagara Pride Inc.

On December 18<sup>th</sup> Niagara Pride transported 2 carloads of toys, collected by the Salvation Army of Niagara Falls, to The Connection & Pinnacle Community Services in Niagara Falls.

In lieu of our Holiday Party, we released a holiday video on our Facebook and YouTube pages full of wishes from local leaders of Shea's Performing Arts Center, Rainbow Seniors Visible and Proud (RSVP), PFLAG, Buffalo Historical Bowling League, Trusted Choice, & Stonewall Democrats. Rupert the Elf read "How to Catch an Elf" for all the children. The Westminster Schola performed "Simple Gifts." At the end, Santa Claus himself made an appearance!

## CANCELLED EVENTS

Second Annual LGBTQ & Elder Care Health Fair was going to be held March 12<sup>th</sup> at the Duke Center from 4 to 6 pm. We had 22 vendors registered. After the health fair a paint night was going to be held during our regularly scheduled meeting time of 6:30 to 8:30 pm. Attendees would have been given paint supplies along with pizza and refreshments.

SAGE: Advocacy & Services for LGBT Elders – We refuse to be invisible  
A SAGE table connects older and younger LGBTQ individuals by sharing a meal. Hosting a SAGE table provides the opportunity to learn about LGBTQ history in a profound way: through the people who lived it. It also helps participants better understand their role in creating history. Niagara Pride reserved the upstairs of GMac's Inn for May 28<sup>th</sup>. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) was going to sponsor the meal.

Regularly scheduled community events that Niagara Pride participates in were cancelled such as the Niagara Falls Memorial Day Parade, the Buffalo Dyke March and Pride Parade, & The New York State Fair.

We were in the middle of planning our Second Annual Niagara Falls Pride Festival for June 26<sup>th</sup> through 28<sup>th</sup> when we had to cancel due to COVID. We were working with the Pride Center of WNY, Destination Niagara USA, Niagara Falls State Park, Old Falls Street, & the City of Niagara Falls. Some items being planned included: co-branded merchandise; discounted parking passes; hotel packages; an Out For Business Happy Hour ("Rainbow Reception") on the Hyatt Place rooftop patio; a block party on Old Falls Street with food vendors; street performers; a petting zoo; an afternoon group walk to the falls for a photo opportunity; an evening drag performance. All these events would have culminated in a catered Pride Picnic on Sunday at Hyde Park.

2020

# Year in Review

donated to local food pantries

**120 LBS FOOD**



52 given to schools

20 given to youth organizations

**72 FILLED BACKPACKS**



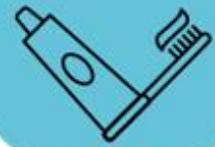
89 hats, 64 scarves, 56 pairs of gloves, 8 jackets, & 72 pairs of socks donated to youth

**289 WINTER ITEMS**



many personal care items donated to local youth and shelters

**PERSONAL CARE ITEMS**

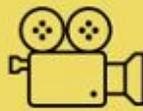


**NIAGARA**

**PRIDE**

**2 FLAG RAISINGS**

City of Niagara Falls  
City of Lockport



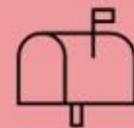
**3 VIDEOS**

Still I Rise  
What Does Pride Mean to Me?  
Holiday Celebration



**12 MEETINGS**

5 Support Meetings  
7 Social Meetings



**35 Letters**

sent to local LGBTQ+ Youth currently in pediatric psychiatric hospitals

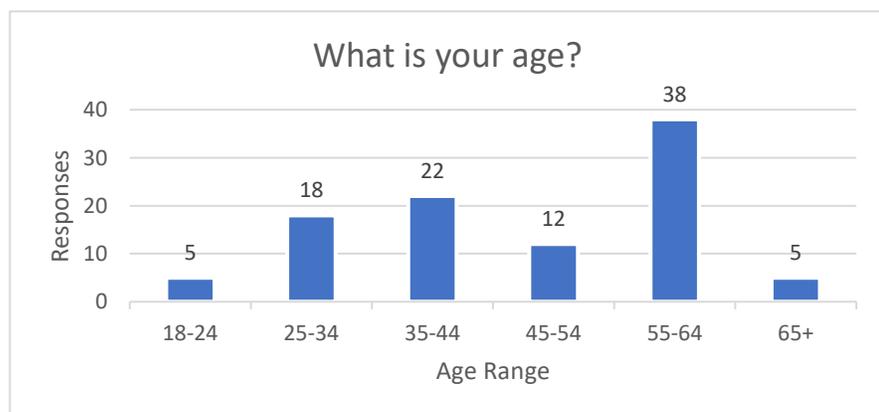
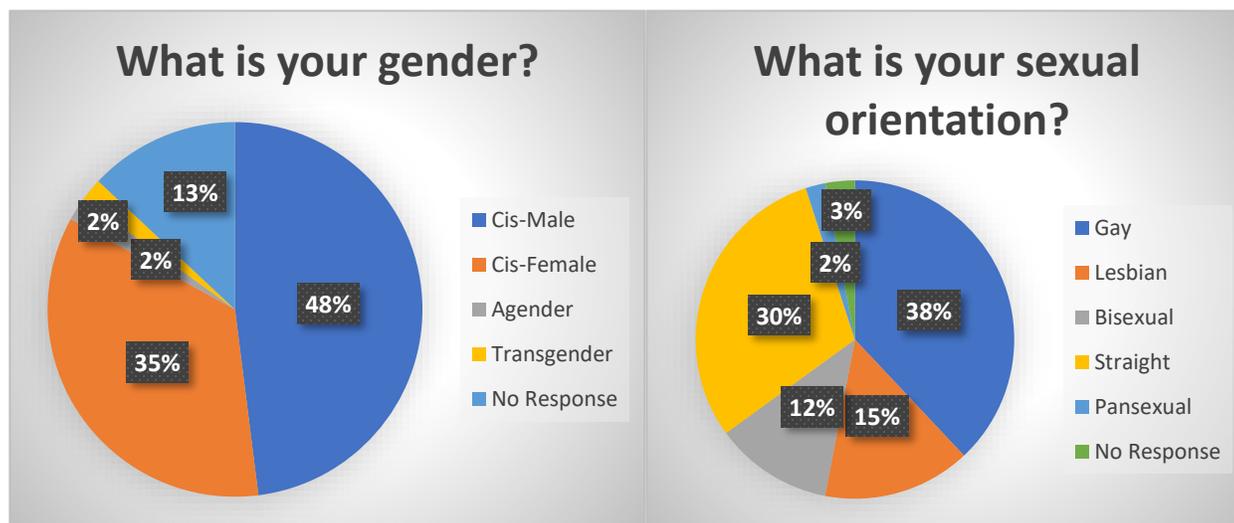
# MEMBER ENGAGEMENT SURVEY 2020

In April we created a survey to help us gather information to assist us in developing meaningful community programming and improve our services. All answers were anonymous. We received 40 responses (78% of which were from residents of Niagara County & 22% from Erie County). 84% of people said they find out about LGBT events in Niagara County via Facebook. 48% of people said the location, time, or day of the week was the primary reason for not attending our programming. The second largest reason was distance or lack of transportation (33%). The third largest reason was fear of attending or fear of being labeled / identified as LGBT (21%).

Ideas for future events included:

- Local field trips like Aquarium Niagara, NACC, Fort Niagara, etc.
- Outdoor events like a bike ride, hike, or walk
- Lectures about personal development, expressing emotion, self-esteem building, how to navigate being gay in a homophobic society, The Gay Agenda: Where are we at? Where do we need to go?, etc.

## Response Demographics





# ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

Over the past three years, Niagara County Pride has grown and expanded from a monthly meeting of LGBTQI individuals, to a community service group. As we continued to grow, our group experienced many changes. Therefore, we have changed our name to Niagara Pride. We are now an independent group and are no longer affiliated with the Pride Center of WNY (PCWNY). PCWNY will continue to run their structured bi-monthly meeting group under the name Niagara County Pride with a new facilitator. Niagara Pride is excited over this new chapter in our group's history and we look forward to updating everyone on our upcoming community donation drives and events. Although we are still undergoing organizational development, we have made many positive strides in 2020 and are looking forward to becoming even more established as an organization and obtaining 501(c)(3) status in 2021!

Sept

12<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>: met with local organizations who recently went through incorporation process  
21<sup>st</sup>: submitted title reservation form  
26<sup>th</sup>: Ron, Brian, Justin, Mark, & Jean voted on as the founding members

Oct

3<sup>rd</sup>: Susan voted as board parliamentarian  
15<sup>th</sup>: received incorporation through New York State  
20<sup>th</sup>: NiagaraPride.org website was launched  
27<sup>th</sup>: Niagara Pride, Inc. letterhead created

Nov

2<sup>nd</sup>: Ron, Brian, & Justin voted as President, Treasurer, & Secretary respectively & acting board became fully-activated board  
9<sup>th</sup>: business bank account was opened  
15<sup>th</sup>: Whistle Blower policy was approved  
20<sup>th</sup>: received "Charity Organization" designation through NYS Attorney General's Office

Dec

10<sup>th</sup>: Niagara Pride Harassment Policy was approved



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