

# The Continuing Struggle for Diversity at UPEI

By Sarah Murphy

UPEI is not safe for its gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) youth.

UPEI is one of the only Canadian university campuses which does not provide a safe space for GLBT students, faculty, and staff.

"There really hasn't been a lot done in the community up until this point, said UPEI alumnus Sue Rodgers, who with the help of UPEI professor Nola Etkin spearheaded the creation of the Abegweit Rainbow Collective (ARC) Youth Project.

It has always been a thought within ARC, which started over a year ago, that such a youth project be created, said Rodgers. Despite her enthusiasm for the enterprise, she is conscious of the risks involved.

"As soon as as you talk about gay and lesbian youth, Rodgers explained, "people assume you are a pedophile; they assume you are recruiting." Such assumptions have already been made about Rodgers who admits this unjust label was one of the organizers' biggest concerns.

The ARC is not working alone. With funding from Health Canada and through dialogue with the minister of education, the collective hope is to begin raising awareness and to provide a safe haven for young adults coming to terms with their sexual orientation. Already, ARC provides informal meeting the first Saturday of every month.

Education is a must.

"Right now classrooms are not safe [for GLBT youth]," said Rodgers. "95% of students have heard homophobic slurs in the classroom, and most of the slurs come from the teachers." Teachers,

staff and councillors must be educated and we must make sure they are not closed minded, insisted Rodgers, a teacher herself. "We must change attitudes."

Rodgers said she has talked to the university, and will be presenting at the health fair. There are

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But Rodgers is not surprised.

"In the past, in my student experience here, there hasn't been a lot of positive stuff, apart from a

to the top of the university."

Despite this, the acceptance of gays and lesbians on campus does not appear to have changed. "There is nothing being done," Rodgers said. "It is almost like a hypocritical space here and how can you change that."

But the university is not the only group to blame.

"I think it is PEI. I think PEI is a scary place to be completely open, and I think that limits people in starting something up," she explained. "Ideally you think something like this could be. But there is a big risk in coming out on PEI and I think everyone sees that."

Rodgers shared her experience as a student during her undergraduate degree in a small town in Alberta. Rodgers, a member of the

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other youth health fairs going on around the province, noted Rodgers, but she feels that the one at the university is important. Unfortunately, according to Rodgers, the UPEI Nursing depart-

ment, the organizers of the student health fair, were a little apprehensive. "There are a lot of students on campus who are gay and lesbian, a lot of faculty who are gay and lesbian, and it has always been in the past, all the way

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