



PRIDE CENTRE OF EDMONTON

July 24, 2019

Letter to the community from the new Executive Director,



I am incredibly honoured and humbled by the opportunity to advance the work of the Pride Centre of Edmonton as the new Executive Director. I am especially grateful to the community members who reached out to me and encouraged me to apply. Without your patience and support, I would not be here. I have always seen myself as a public servant first and foremost, so moving forward from being a provincially elected official to a community-focused position is a move that feels like a natural fit.

Like many members of our community, I have turned to the Pride Centre of Edmonton and the people who work here at moments in my life when there was nowhere else that felt safe. I share the vision the Pride Centre has in ensuring Edmonton continues to grow its capacity to build and support gender and sexually diverse individuals. I know that I come into this position during a crossroads. Our Centre's future depends on leadership and a strong vision that must be led by the new board and myself. We must create space for collaboration that welcomes a spectrum of advocacy styles and experiences. I am confident my lived and professional experiences make me uniquely qualified and motivated to conduct this crucial work.

I know that to make progress means creating spaces where we can have courageous conversations about meaningful topics. I am proud to say that I have broken the glass ceiling in becoming one of the first openly non-binary queer MLA, the first Colombian-Canadian MLA, and the youngest government whip in Alberta's history. What I take from my accomplishments is the necessity to listen with humility, to be vulnerable and willing to make mistakes in order to learn and make tangible progress, and address tough issues, especially when it comes to talking about race and its intersections.

As the new Executive Director, I want to ensure that the commitments outlined in the Board's Statement in April will also be implemented throughout the organization. Over the next few months, I will be leading the Pride Centre of Edmonton through necessary organizational changes beginning by reviewing current policies and implementing changes as required. These transformations are necessary in recognition that staff success also relies on how, the Pride Centre, provides tools for resiliency within emotionally complex work and with work hours that are malleable to the needs of the community. From the initial feedback I have heard, ensuring there are consistent policies that are applied allows for issues to be resolved on an ongoing basis and it all prevents our personal biases from dictating to whom which rules are applied.



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The main areas of focus will be:

1. Review the HR policies to ensure a supportive and inclusive workplace.
 - a. Recognizing that employees are often part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community and the work can be emotional. I will work to ensure that the health benefits provided to staff have adequate coverage to support any mental health needs that arise from working in an emotionally charged environment.
 - b. Provide opportunities for former employees to utilize voluntary exit interviews for the purpose of informing the policy review and focus.
 - c. Evaluate new methods of staff evaluations. Ensure expectations are appropriate for skills and supplemented by appropriate training.
 - d. Ensure all staff is trained in understanding their own personal bias and privilege.
2. Review, from an intersectional lens, the equity of distribution in programming and services in terms of how they address the needs of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Connect with community partners to strategize the appropriate ways to address any recognized gaps.
3. Provide informal ways for connecting to folks that we serve and active community groups. I will be seeking out creative outlets that seek to modernize the newsletter format of keeping people in the loop of what's going and in addition allows for accountability.

I look forward to taking this opportunity to grow the capacity of the Centre and develop long-standing sustainable practices. I know that the board and our community will hold me accountable to this.

In Solidarity,
Estefania Cortes Vargas (all pronouns)
Executive Director