

LET'S AMPLIFY ALL VOICES IN OUR COMMUNITIES

EQUALITY AND INCLUSION MUST BE OUR MANDATE THROUGHOUT HALTON, WRITES MATTHEW CONROY



theifp.ca /vote2021

In June, I wrote about the importance of Pride and acknowledging that the 2SLGBTQ+ community exists every day.

While that statement still stands strong, we must also be mindful of how we can continue to create a momentous celebration of the diversity within Halton.

As the region's population continues to grow, we need to provide space and platforms for marginalized communities to actively participate in the conversations and opportunities that are given to those with privilege.

According to the 2020 Community Safety and Well-Being Population Level Indicator Report, 72 percent of Halton residents

"As resident concerns continue to arise, such as anti-Black racism, homophobia or transphobia, continuous and momentous changes and shifts in behaviour are needed."

aged 12 and over felt a very, or somewhat strong, sense of community belonging.

Although this could be interpreted as a positive, high percentage, I have to wonder which identities are included within it.

This is especially concerning given that in February of this year, the Halton Police Board stated that the number of reported hate-related incidents in the region increased by 160 per cent in 2020.

This increase indicates

a growing number of reasons why residents would not feel safe, or that they belong, within our neighbourhoods.

As residents' concerns continue to arise — such as anti-Black racism, homophobia or transphobia — continuous and momentous changes and shifts in behaviour are needed.

When consulting with communities and providing opportunities for engagement, especially when focusing on diversity and

inclusion, it needs to be done in a way that embraces, empowers and emphasizes diverse and intersectional identities.

We need to ensure that these communities are included every step of the way with every initiative, as it is truly the only way to include lived experiences and hear directly from them what changes need to be made so that we can increase that sense of community belonging.

For example, we cannot create inclusive spaces within our region without consulting directly with our 2SLGBTQ+ community, nor can we ground our work in decolonization and reconciliation without having direct input and feedback from our Indigenous community.

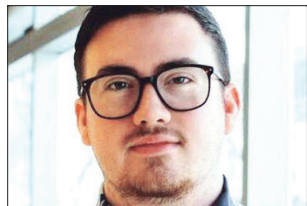
We must be intentional with the work and practices that we do, both personally

and professionally. Diversity and inclusion matter because our communities should feel comfortable, safe and represented across the region. Let's strive to use our privilege to provide equal opportunities for those who are often left out, and then we can begin to make inclusive, sustainable and impactful changes that will hopefully help our residents feel like they belong in Halton.

Matthew Conroy is the 2SLGBTQ+ youth drop-in co-ordinator for Positive Space Network, affiliated with the Reach Out Centre for Kids (ROCK). He can be reached at matthewc@rockonline.ca.



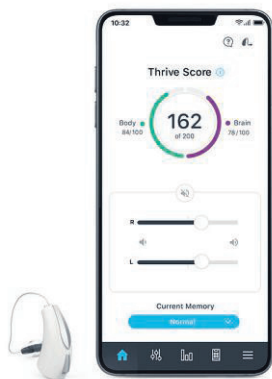
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MATTHEW CONROY
Column

Metroland's Halton newspapers reached out to members of their Halton Advisory Council to share their views on local issues in conjunction with the federal election. Here's the second part of a three-part series.

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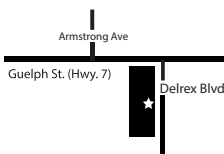
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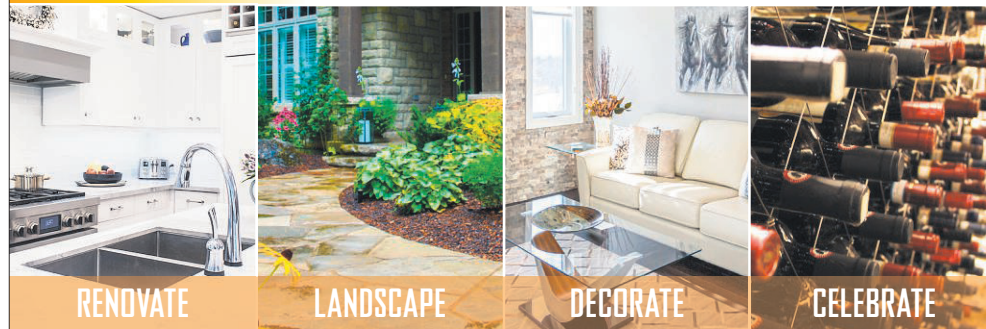
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