

Safe Spaces Event Will Test Our Tolerance And Acceptance

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Most people who live here like to think that Revelstoke is a progressive and enlightened community but that image is about to be tested through an event called *Safe Spaces* at Conversations this evening, Thursday, April 10.

Safe Spaces, which begins at 7 pm, is a free event supported through the provincial Embrace BC program, which promotes social diversity. It will

feature a discussion about homophobia led by Ryan Clayton, a young man from Salmon Arm who works as an anti-homophobia facilitator in communities across the province. And it will include excerpts from an upcoming Revelstoke Theatre Company production of the play *Dog Sees God* and music by Sharlene Foisy.

In a way, this is an opportunity to test the waters of tolerance in Revelstoke and discover how accepting our community really is. My guess is that the people of our town are accepting of gay people. But since there has been no public discussion about homosexuality in Revelstoke — at least not in the 13 years I have lived here — there's no way to really tell.

"It's time that silence is broken," organizer Laura Stovel said in an interview.

Here's something to consider from an anti-homophobia presentation package on [Ryan Clayton's website](#): "In North America gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer (GLBTQ) youth face shocking levels of discrimination and physical and emotional violence. These youth currently have the highest suicide rate of any minority group in Canada. Unfortunately discrimination based on perceived sexual orientation or gender identity has far-reaching consequences. Even youth who identify themselves as heterosexual report discrimination through homophobic comments and, at times, physical violence."

Gay people do live here, but they keep their heads down and try not to draw attention to themselves. That's not surprising given the fact that being gay could get

you beaten up in some Canadian cities and towns not that long ago and probably still could if you were in the wrong place at the wrong time. That's just plain wrong. Gay people have the same right to live their lives as openly and free of fear as heterosexuals.

Safe Spaces promises to be an interesting evening event that tests our commitment to freedom and tolerance.

It starts at 7 pm at Conversations. I hope to see you there.