

SPECTRUM's Immigrant and Refugee Services – A Brief History

(Written by Jim Parrott)

In early 2015, in response to queries by immigrants and refugees who identified as belonging to the rainbow community, SPECTRUM began to offer services specifically for newcomers. The services consisted of (1) social/support groups (which had a variety of names over the years), and (2) additional services to aid in achieving refugee status based on persecution on the basis of their sexual orientation. What is documented below covers the groups for newcomers.

2015, February 12 (Thursday) – In early 2015, SPECTRUM was seeking to relocate from its current location at 42 Erb Street East (Waterloo), since it had become increasingly difficult to book the program space for its events there. It was under these circumstances that SPECTRUM inaugurated its monthly Rainbow Newcomers group. The first meeting was on 2015, February 12 (Thursday).

The initial listing in the *Rainbow Community Calendar* (2015, February. Volume 3, Number 5) read "**2015, February 12 (Thursday) Rainbow Newcomers Group. 7-9pm. SPECTRUM, 42 Erb St E, Waterloo. A place for LGBTQ-identified immigrants and refugees to talk, and discuss issues related to being a newcomer to Canada."**

For that month, and also March, the Rainbow Newcomers group met in the Waterloo venue (42 Erb St E.) until April 2015, when it was no longer possible to book rooms in that facility.

2015, April 9 (Thursday). By April, SPECTRUM was forced to find alternative venues to host its various events until SPECTRUM could find a new home. Kitchener's Downtown Community Centre hosted the next few meetings for the newcomers group. The April listing in the *Rainbow Community Calendar* (2015, April. Volume 3, Number 7) read "**2015, April 9 (Thursday) Rainbow Newcomers. 7-9pm. By SPECTRUM. Pre-School Room, Downtown Community Centre, 35-B Weber St W, Kitchener. A place for LGBTQ-identified immigrants and refugees to socialize with each other and with LGBTQ people who have been in town for a while, and discuss issues related to being a newcomer to Canada."**

2015, September 10 (Thursday). Over the Summer, SPECTRUM organized its new home in the former Boehmer Box Building in Kitchener. September marked the first meeting of the newcomers group in the new location. In September 2015,

we finally moved to our Duke St location. The September listing in the *Rainbow Community Calendar* (2015, September. Volume 3, Number 12) read "**2015, September 9 (Thursday) Rainbow Newcomers**. 7-9pm. @ SPECTRUM, 283 Duke St W, Unit 210, Kitchener. Park on Breithaupt St near the loading dock. A place for LGBTQ-identified immigrants and refugees to socialize with each other and with LGBTQ people who have been in town for a while, and discuss issues related to being a newcomer to Canada."

2018, February 8 (Thursday). This month, SPECTRUM changed the name and scope of the newcomers group to "Rainbow Multicultural Connect" in the hope of broadening the scope beyond newcomers. The February listing in the *Rainbow Community Calendar* (2018, February. Volume 6, Number 5) read "**February 8. Rainbow Multicultural Connect**. 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at SPECTRUM. A group where people from diverse cultures gather together at SPECTRUM to discuss what it is like to be LGBTQ+ across the world. We meet on the second Thursdays of the month."

For some time, there was an increase in participation by individuals who were not newcomers, but gradually the group was attended once again primarily by refugee claimants sent to us by their lawyers so that we could eventually write them letters of support - a service that we had been providing for several years before the name change.

2020, February 9 (Sunday). After meeting on the 2nd Thursday of the month from 7-9 pm since its inception, the newcomers meetings were moved to the 2nd Sunday from 3-5 pm. The February and March meetings of 2020 were the only ones held on Sunday afternoons in SPECTRUM's physical space for a long time, because the Newcomers meetings had to be shifted to Zoom in April, 2020. The February listing in the *Rainbow Community Calendar* (2020, February. Volume 8, Number 5) read "**February 9. Rainbow Multicultural Connect**. 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. at SPECTRUM. A gathering at SPECTRUM to discuss what it is like to be LGBTQ+ across the world."

2020, April 12 (Sunday). By April of 2020, SPECTRUM had shuttered its doors, and was able to deliver most of its programming via Zoom, including the newcomers group. The April listing in the *Rainbow Community Calendar* (2020, April. Volume 8, Number 7) read "**April 12. Rainbow Multicultural Connect**

Online. 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. An online group where people from diverse cultures gather together to discuss what it is like to be LGBTQ+ across the world. We meet on the second Sunday of the month. To join our online gathering, please contact virtual@ourspectrum.com”

2022, July 10 (Sunday). With this meeting, this program was re-branded as Rainbow Newcomers Connect, with the following annotation: “We’re excited to announce the relaunch of Rainbow Newcomers Connect! Our next meeting is coming up on the second Sunday of this month (July 10th). These social gatherings are a chance for us to learn from each other as rainbow community members coming from a variety of cultural backgrounds! SPECTRUM welcomes newcomers and immigrants, and we hope to see you at our meeting!” This rebranding marked a return to the original focus of the group. This was also the first hybrid meeting of the group, in which it was possible to attend in SPECTRUM’s physical space or online via Zoom.