

Syrian Announced as Grand Marshal for Pride March

Kelowna Pride is pleased to announce the Grand Marshal for their 2018 Pride March, Anas Qartoumeh. As a gay Syrian refugee, Anas is an excellent representation of Kelowna Pride 2018's theme: Pride in Diversity. "Anas has been on an extraordinary journey to get to here," shares Dustyn Baulkham, past President of Kelowna Pride. "He reminds us of what is still happening to LGBT2Q+ people in some parts of the world. At Pride, we march for those who are not able to live as their authentic selves."

Anas had to hide his identity his whole life. He grew up in the conservative culture of Damascus, where being gay is not only stigmatized by society, but also criminalized. He would often watch Pride parades on TV and dreamed of moving to Canada, where he could be himself. However, when war broke out in Syria, the risks of being gay escalated. Word spread that members of the LGBT2Q+ community were being thrown off buildings by ISIS. Anas finally fled to Lebanon and then Iraq.

After waiting on a refugee application for some time, Anas finally found Rainbow Refugees (a Vancouver-based non-profit organization), who helped him connect with the group that sponsored him, the Central Okanagan Refugee Committee (CORC). On November 23, 2017, Anas arrived in Kelowna to a group of his sponsors waving rainbow flags and welcoming him to Canada. Just over 8 months later, Anas feels settled in the community and is enjoying his job as a senior accountant at KPMG.

"I would love to deliver this message to conservative parents in the middle east and across the world." says Anas. "Being gay is not a choice. And some of your kids might be afraid to come out to you. Please learn from Canada. Embrace and accept your kids and let them choose you as the first person to come out to."

Anas will share his story at Stuart Park before the Pride March on Saturday, August 18.

Details for all Pride events can be found at www.kelownapride.com/events-and-pride