



Media Advisory

For immediate release

Durham Public Libraries Win Ontario Library Association Awards for Drag Queen Storytime

January 31, 2024—Durham Region Public Libraries in partnership with the Durham Children’s Aid Society (CAS) have won the Ontario Library Association (OLA) Les Fowlie Intellectual Freedom award and the Joyce Cunningham Award, which were awarded at the OLA Super-Conference on January 25, 2024. The awards are in recognition of hosting, promoting, and celebrating 2023 Drag Queen Storytimes.

The OLA Les Fowlie Intellectual Freedom Award recognizes courage shown by individuals and organizations in defending the rights of library patrons to full access to information. The Ontario Library Boards' Association (OLBA) Joyce Cunningham Award honours collaborative efforts that have demonstrated high levels of collaboration and innovation to produce outstanding results.

In addition to Durham CAS, Durham Region Public Libraries wish to thank Durham PFLAG, municipal Diversity and Inclusion teams, municipal Emergency Services, and the Durham community as a whole for coming together and making Drag Queen Storytimes an outstanding and inclusive success.

“This innovative partnership has demonstrated the value and strength in collaboration,” says Steve Woodman, Durham CAS Executive Director. “The storytime events are fun, family events that encourage literacy and healthy child development. They are also so much more. In the face of adversity, these events are a powerful statement of solidarity and honour for all children, youth and families from the 2SLGBTQI+ communities. We are proud to stand with our partners at all the Durham Region public libraries in continuing to present this critical program.”

The Durham CAS and Durham Libraries have partnered since 2019 and delivered eight Drag Queen Storytimes in 2023. The unified approach ensured successful programs with more than one thousand children and families in attendance throughout the Region.

According to Durham CAS, approximately 10% of Durham Region’s population identifies as 2SLGBTQIA+, with that number being much higher in the child welfare system. These youth are more likely to experience rejection, neglect, or abuse when their family learns of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Public libraries remain free and open places, champions for equitable access to diversity of information and ideas, intellectual freedom, and freedom of speech. The

public libraries of Durham Region are inclusive and welcoming spaces for all and help build support, understanding, and acceptance for one another. Plans for 2024 Drag Queen Storytimes are already underway.

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