

Introducing the 2SLGBTQI+ Rainbow Wing at The Rekai Centres Journey to Inclusivity for Rainbow Seniors



Barbara Michalik
Executive Director, Community, Academic Partnerships and Programming
Rekai Centres
July 2025



AGENDA

- Rainbow Mission and Values
- Our 2SLGBTQI+ seniors history
- Our research
- Trail Blazers
- Our Plan
- Partnerships Home & Community Care TC-LHIN
- Committees of the Rainbow Wing
- The Birth: Rainbow Wing
- Rainbow Wing Transformation including the Legacy Wall
- Partnership with Pride Toronto
- Rainbow Seniors Pride Events
- Media Coverage & Speaking Engagements
- Supporting 2SLGBTQI+ Education and the creation of a Rainbow Wing
- Testimonials
- Q & A

Rainbow Wing Mission and Values

We strive to Provide a safe space for older 2SLGBTQI+ to host and find their chosen family.

Our Mission at the Rekai Centres is to empower our residents to live rich, purposeful lives. The 2SLGBTQI+ population deserve a place where they can be themselves without fear. By creating the first Long-Term Care units dedicated to this population, we want to welcome them and their allies to a place that they can call Home.

History of 2SLGBTQI+ and Rekai Centres

2009: Rekai Centres partners with Senior Pride Network

2010-2014: Extensive training sessions with community partners; The 519, Egale, Rainbow Health and Toronto Public Health.

2011: The Rekai Centres partnered with Casey House to develop a video teaching series titled “Compassionate Care in a Changing Landscape: HIV/AIDS and Long-Term Care”.

2016: The Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) was created at Rekai Centres to provide a space for members to communicate and address needs of the community.

2017: Rekai Centres is selected to be a member of the advisory committee at Senior’s Pride Network Toronto.

2019: “Bridging the Gap” Pride event held at Rekai Centres to address the need for LGBTQ2SI+ participation in long term care homes

2019: Championship Education conducted for frontline staff to support an inclusive approach to care held at Wellesley Central Place in partnership with All Welcoming – Martin

2022: Partnership with Pride Toronto for the first LTC 2SLGBTQI+ senior event during Pride week.

Partnership with Home and Community Care TC-LHIN – provincial identification of the Rainbow Wing.

Rainbow Wing Micro-training for all staff working on the unit – multidisciplinary education.

Establishment of the Rainbow Wing Advisory and Operations Committees.



June 18th, 2022: Rekai Centres & Pride Toronto host 1st Rainbow Seniors Event “Hear Me, See Me, Feel Me”, in Long-Term Care with 250 in attendance.

June 17th, 2023: Rekai Centres & Pride Toronto host 2nd Rainbow Seniors Event “HERE, THERE, EVERYWHERE”, in Long-Term Care with 450 in attendance.

June 15th, 2024: Rekai Centres & Pride Toronto to host 3rd Rainbow Seniors Event “BE__” in Long-Term Care with 600+ in attendance

June 14th, 2025: Rekai Centres & Pride Toronto to host 4th Rainbow Seniors Event “ALL IN” with 600+ in attendance

June 2025 – Partnership with CLRI and on the Advisory Board for EDI and specifically for inclusion of the 2SLGBTQI+ community

The Gordon Story

- Gordon Sharp was admitted to Rekai Centre at Sherbourne Place on November 2005 and later was transferred to our sister location, Wellesley Central Place.
- Gordon was an active resident; he enjoyed reading, newspapers, TV, bingo halls and dancing.
- During his residency, he confided and disclosed his identity as a part of the 2SLGBTQI+ community but stressed the importance of secrecy.
- At that moment, we realized the importance of meeting the needs of the 2SLGBTQI+ community in a long-term care setting.
- Gordon Sharp's story helped establish the groundwork for a 2SLGBTQI+ inclusive, safe space for all residents, chosen family and staff of the Rekai Centres.



Our Research 2018 - 2019

Three community focus groups were held:

Key Findings:

- The need for culturally sensitive staff who are allies or actual members of the community,
- The need to revise the admission process to breakdown systematic barriers that persist in health care.
- An environment that is fully representative of the 2SLGBTQI+ identity.

Polling Results:

The Ipsos Survey which surveyed members, over 50, from the 2SLGBTQI+ community indicated that 94% were in favour of having a dedicated unit for this population.

Current estimates show that there are over 65,000 individuals in the city of Toronto who identify as being part of the 2SLGBTQI+ community over the age of 65, a number which will only grow as the population ages.

Trail Blazers

2021

**United Kingdom
Tonic: first LGBTQ
Retirement Home &
2SLGBTQI+ Health
and Wellbeing**

**Communities: first
in Glasgow and
Edinburgh**



2022

**Rekai Centres at
Wellesley Central
Place: first
2SLGBTQI+ Rainbow
Wing dedicated to
seniors**

2028

**Rekai Centres at
Cherry Place:
second 2SLGBTQI+
Rainbow Wing**

Our Plan

There will be two Rainbow Wings:

- The Rainbow Wing at Wellesley Central Place (25 bed unit) located at Wellesley and Sherbourne, two blocks from the Village, opened in June 2022
- The Rainbow Wing at Cherry Place (22 bed unit), located at Front and Cherry, a block from the Distillery District, opening in 2028.

Creating a safe space for the 2SLGBTQI+ community at the Re kai Centres will be exemplified through

- Educated staff that are culturally competent in providing care for the 2SLGBTQI+ community
- Identified staff as members or allies
- Curated programming catered towards the needs of the residents
- Inclusive environment through reflective artwork and physical plant modifications
- Rainbow Champion program with elements of EDI training and accountability sessions

Home and Community Care Services is strongly supporting this initiative.

- They have adjusting the Home Selection form to reflect the new Rainbow Wing.
- They have assigned a Placement Coordinator to be fully informed about this Wing and to handle all enquiries internally.
- They are promoted the Rainbow Wing across Ontario—the promotional page we created was distributed to all Home and Community Care Placement Co-ordinators across Ontario
- They attended the Pride event “Hear Me, See Me, Feel Me at the Rekai Centres at Wellesley Central Place on June 18, 2022.

Partnership with Ontario Health at Home (Home and Community Care Toronto)

Our 2SLGBTQI+ History:

2009: Rekai Centres partners with Senior Pride Network

2015: The Rekai Centres partnered with Casey House to develop a video teaching series titled "Compassionate Care in a Changing Landscape: HIV/AIDS and Long-Term Care".

2016: The Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) was created at Rekai Centres to provide a space for members to communicate and address needs of the community.

2019: Bridging the Gap Pride event held at Rekai Centres to address the need for 2SLGBTQI+ participation in long term care homes.

2021: Increasing visual awareness for the 2SLGBTQI+ communities and supporting a championship training module for dedicated front-line staff at Rekai Centres by .

2022: Specialized 2SLGBTQI+ LTC Micro-Training to support dedicated front-line staff on the Rainbow Wing.

2022: Rekai Centres to open the first Rainbow Wing in North America at the Rekai Centre at Wellesley Central Place.

June 18th, 2022: Rekai Centres & Pride Toronto host 1st Rainbow Seniors Event "Hear Me, See Me, Feel Me", in Long-Term Care with 250 in attendance.

June 17th, 2024: Rekai Centres & Pride Toronto host 2nd Rainbow Seniors Event "HERE, THERE, EVERYWHERE", in Long-Term Care with 450 in attendance.

June 15th, 2024: Rekai Centres & Pride Toronto to host 3rd Rainbow Seniors Event "BE__" in Long-Term Care.

For more information, please contact:

Barbara Michalik,
Executive Director,
Academic, Community Partnerships and Programming
barbaram@rekaicentres.com

The Rekai Centres The Rainbow Wing

Our Mission and Values

We strive to provide a safe space for older 2SLGBTQI+ individuals to host and find their chosen family

Our mission at the Rekai Centres is to empower our residents to live rich, purposeful lives. The 2SLGBTQI+ population deserve a place where they can be themselves without fear. By creating the first Long-Term Care units dedicated to this population, we want to welcome them and their allies to a place that they can call home.



THE
REKAI
CENTRES

Living life to the fullest

Why a Rainbow Wing?

The Ipsos Survey, conducted in 2018 at the request of Rekai Centres, involved strategic polling and focus groups within the 2SLGBTQI+ community. It was found that 94% of the 2SLGBTQI+ community were in favour of a dedicated unit. Current estimates show that there are over 65,000 individuals who identify as being part of the 2SLGBTQI+ community over the age of 65 - a number which will only grow as the population ages.

The focus groups highlighted the need for culturally sensitive staff who are allies or members of the community. They also stressed a need for the revision of the admission process to breakdown systematic barriers that persist in health care. Lastly, they want an environment that is fully representative of the 2SLGBTQI+ identity.

Location and Plan

There will be two Rainbow Wings:

- The Rainbow Wing at Wellesley Central Place (25 bed unit) located at Wellesley and Sherbourne, two blocks from the Village, opening in 2022
- The Rainbow Wing at Cherry Place (22 bed unit), located at Front and Cherry, a block from the distillery district, opening in 2026.

Creating a safe space for the 2SLGBTQI+ community at the Rekai Centres will be exemplified through

- Educated staff that are culturally competent in providing care for the 2SLGBTQI+ community
- Identified staff as members or allies
- Curated programming catered towards the needs of the residents
- Inclusive environment through reflective artwork



Committees from the Rainbow Wing

The Advisory Committee: chaired by Barbara Michalik, Executive Director of Community, Academic Partnerships and Programming, with support from Dr. Marcus Law, one of our physicians, who advise on issues from changes to the physical environment, training of staff, curation of programming, evaluating the strength and weaknesses etc. Committee is comprised of community advocates and leaders: ***St. Michael's Hospital, Casey House, Pride Toronto, Seniors Pride Network, Family Services Toronto, Arquives, Rainbow Health Ontario and more.***

The Operations Committee: chaired by Danielle Herrington, Manager of Programs & Volunteer Services, who ensures standards of care for the 2SLGBTQI+ community and maintain resources, guides and content laid out by the advisory committee. Committee is comprised of ***residents, chosen family members of resident and staff champions from all disciplines.***

Rainbow Wing Welcoming Doors - Artwork



Donated work by:
Andrew Stelmack

Rainbow Wing Transformation



The Rekal Centres 2SLGBTQI+ Rainbow Wing 2024

"Home of the First 2SLGBTQI+ Rainbow Wing in North America"

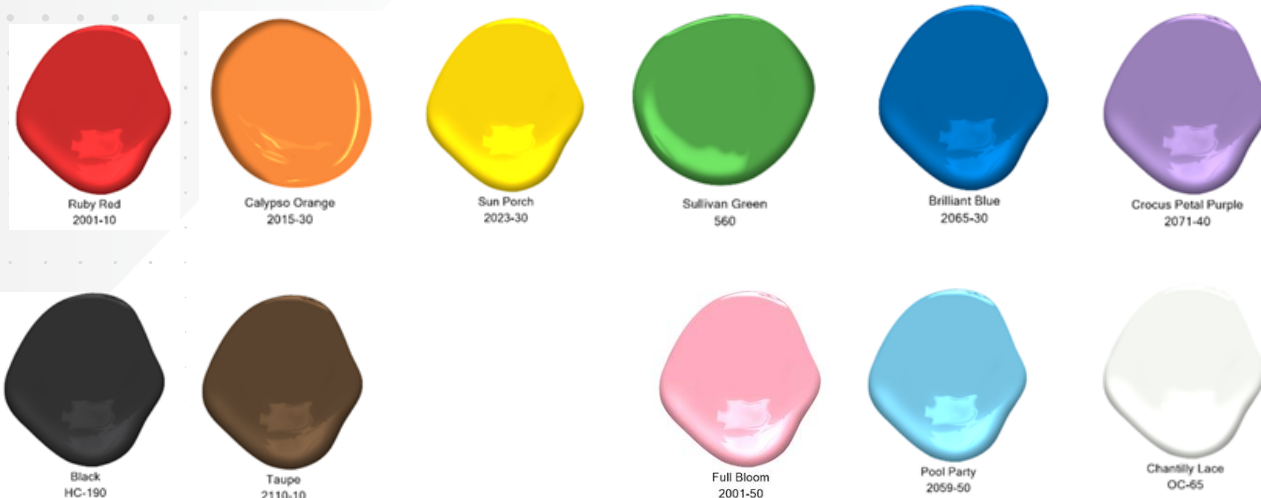
Paint Details

NB: All paint used for the Rainbow Wing were semi-gloss and low VOC Aura Paint

COLOUR	BM COLOUR NAME/CODE	COLOUR REPRESENTATION
RED	Ruby Red 2001-10	Evocative of blood, red represents the vital life force within us and the passion that drives us.
ORANGE	Calypso Orange 2015-30	Fun and celebratory, orange represents healing in the face of adversity.
YELLOW	Sun Porch 2023-30	The radiant center of the pride flag, yellow represents sunlight and stimulates new ideas.
GREEN	Sullivan Green 560	The colour of nature, green represents growth and underlines that the 2SLGBTQIA+ is a natural part of world.
BLUE/INDIGO	Brilliant Blue 2065-30	Soothing to the soul, blue represents a sense of calm and serenity.
VIOLET	Crocus Petal Purple 2071-40	Considered a royal hue representative of pride, violet represents spirit and a connection to the spiritual realm.
BLACK & BROWN	Black HC-190 & Taupe 2112-10	People of colour in the 2SLGBTQIA+ have led the way when it comes to queer rights but have often been left out of the history books. Black and brown was added to the Pride flag in 2018 with the creation of the Progress Pride Flag. Trans women of colour, such as the likes of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, have been vital to 2SLGBTQIA+ liberation and stood on the front lines after the events of the Stonewall Riots.
PINK, LIGHT BLUE & WHITE	Full Bloom 2001-50, Pool Party 2059-50 & Chantilly Lace OC-65	Pink and blue balance the feminine and the masculine while white stands for those in the midst of transitioning, as well as those who exist outside of the gender binary.

Phase 1

Rainbow Painting and meaning of flag colours represented.



The rainbow flag, has become a universal symbol of hope for 2SLGBTQI+ people around the world, first flew in San Francisco's United Nations Plaza for Gay Pride Day, on June 25, 1978.

It had eight colors – two more than today's version – and was designed by Gilbert Baker, an openly gay artist and activist. He had been commissioned to design a symbol for the LGBTQ community by his friend Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in California.

Rainbow Wing Transformation



➤ Phase 1 continued

Rainbow Painting and meaning of flag colours represented.

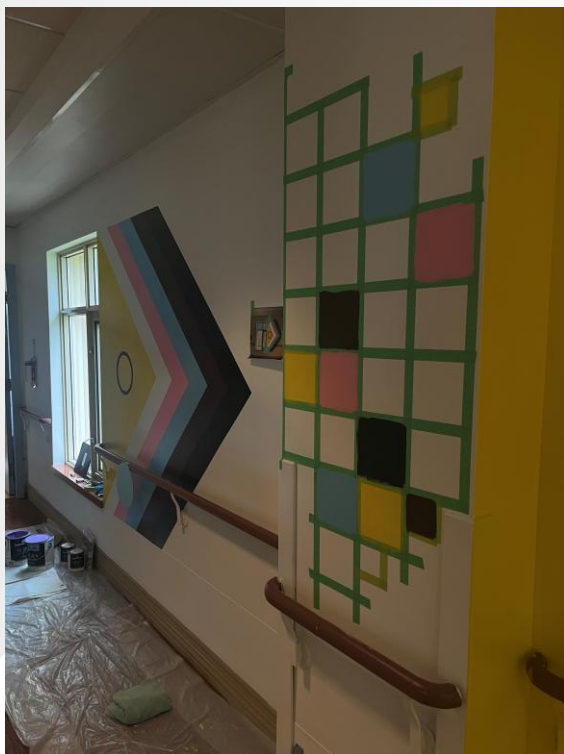
PROGRESS - CURRENT

BEFORE



Rainbow Wing Transformantion

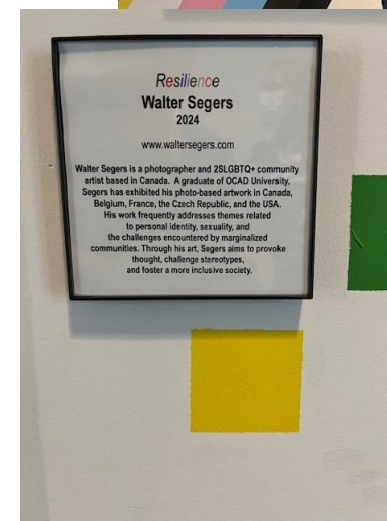
➤ Phase 2 - RFP granted to Community Artist Walter Segers: painting of tringle, circle, black/brown strips and trans strips - May 16th - May 23rd, 2024



BISEXUAL
BROWN
BLACK
LIFE
HEALING
TWO SPIRITED
NEW IDEAS
SERENITY
TRANS PEOPLE
GAY
PROSPERITY
INTERSEX
PEOPLE OF COLOUR
NONBINARY
QUEER
LESBIAN



Progressive Flag



Rainbow Wing Transformantion



Phase 3

Legacy/History Wall – June 2025 in partnership with Walter Segers Community Artist and Aquives Toronto, Canada

Time-line featuring positive moments in the 2SLGBTQI+ history in Toronto. Images, articles and tactile object and descriptions to be displayed.

Partnership with Pride Toronto

Join us at Rekai Centres

Hear Me, See Me, Feel Me
A celebration of 2SLGBTQI+ seniors at Pride

Saturday, June 18, 2022 1PM – 4PM
Rekai Centre at Wellesley Central Place
160 Wellesley Street East

Celebrating the first 2SLGBTQI+ 25 bed Rainbow Wing in Long-Term Care in North America!
Our **FREE** event highlights local Queer performances with food, ice cream and much more!

Senior Pride Network THE REKAI CENTRES Living life to the fullest Pride TORONTO buddies IN BAD TIMES THEATRE

HERE, THERE, EVERYWHERE
Celebrating our Champions THEN & NOW

Join us for a celebration of 2SLGBTQI+ Seniors at Pride
Saturday, June 17, 2023 1pm to 4pm
Rekai Centre at Wellesley Central Place
160 Wellesley Street East, Toronto
Please RSVP to Barbara Michalik – Executive Director Community and Academic Partnerships and Programming by June 14th, 2023
barbaram@rekaicentres.com

Our **free event** highlights local queer performances with food, ice cream & much more!

FEATURING
The Divine Ms. Carole Pope — Bon Bon Bombay — Bonnie Henderson
Delirious — Jade Elektra — Grace Mojave — Monica Garrido
Cedar Circle Drummers — DJ Pluto — Fontaine
WITH SPECIAL GUEST
SOFONDA

DESIGN BY BRADEN LEIBOVITZ REKAI RAINBOW CHAMPION

Home of the first 2SLGBTQI+ Rainbow Wing in Long-Term Care in North America!



Be LOUD
JOIN US FOR A CELEBRATION OF 2SLGBTQI+ RAINBOW SENIORS AT PRIDE

With special guest Sofonda

Our **FREE EVENT** highlights local queer performances with **FOOD, ICE CREAM, & much more!**

ALSO INCLUDING
DJ Valeroo, Ori Dagan, Titus Androgynous, Annemarie Costigan, BonBon Bombay, AND MUCH MORE!

SATURDAY, JUNE 15, 2024 1-3PM
The Rekai Centre at Wellesley Central Place 160 Wellesley Street East, Toronto

RSVP HERE

HOME OF THE FIRST 2SLGBTQI+ RAINBOW WING IN LONG-TERM CARE IN NORTH AMERICA

REKAI CENTRES IS PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY:

TD TO READY COMMITMENT buddies IN BAD TIMES THEATRE Senior Pride Network



Partnership with Pride Toronto 2025



Pride Event at Re kai Centres



Pride Event at Rekai Centres



2SLGBTQI+ Initiatives at The Rekai Centres

Embracing Inclusivity and Diversity while highlighting champions and 2SLGBTQI+ programming and various research initiative in collaboration with placement students and Rekai



2SLGBTQI+ Special Project: Affirming Care Guidebook

December 2022 Proposal

Overview

The purpose of this guide is to provide an educational tool on 2SLGBTQIA+ affirming care. This handbook informs staff and students on safe and inclusive practices for 2SLGBTQIA residents, Rekai staff members and community members accessing the centre.

(individualized care)

Goals

This handbook aims to support the front-of-line staff to navigate care for 2SLGBTQIA+ residents to build, implement and integrate practices that are detrimental to the overall



2SLGBTQI+ Initiatives supported

➤ Grant applications:

1. Rekai Centres awarded 2024– TD Ready Commitment Grant \$20,000 to support Rainbow seniors Pride Event for the next 2 years. Cheque ceremony held on June 13th at the Church and Wellesley Branch.
2. Rekai Centres awarded 2025 – TD Ready Commitment: Age Better Innovative Programming Grant for \$150,000 to support 2SLGBTQI+ seniors and reduce isolation within the community.



➤ Advocacy...it never stops!

- Ontario Health formally known as Home and Community Care & Advantage Ontario – Designation ‘Rainbow Wing’ as a cultural necessity. Currently in progress...
- The law, Bill 7, was introduced in 2022 and sparked concern from many in the long-term care space who worried about seniors being moved to homes far from their families or into unfamiliar settings.



Media Coverage

1. [Many LGBTQ seniors entering long-term care hide their identities. The 'Rainbow Wing' aims to change that | The Star](#)
2. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/rainbow-wing-rekai-centres-opening-1.6493737>
3. <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=2467932>
4. [Toronto Central May Board Meeting: Shoshana's Story – YouTube](#)
5. [LGBTQ2S+ seniors in long term care | The Social – YouTube](#)
6. [Global News June 2025: Rainbow Wing offers seniors a safe space | Watch News Videos Online](#)
7. [CTV News June 2025: <https://toronto.citynews.ca/video/2025/06/25/creating-a-safe-space-for-2slgbtq-seniors/>](#)

Media Continued...



"In 2019, the Rekai Centres conducted a community study through Ipsos to evaluate the needs of LGBTQ2S+ seniors living in the area. The results, in addition to internal conversations, informed the development of what would soon become the Rainbow Wing.

"The community was overwhelmingly supportive of having a [LGBTQ2S+] unit," she says, explaining the Rainbow Wing houses beds for LGBTQ2S+ residents who then access supports and services in the same communal space as residents of other wings in the building

Wellesley Central Place, the Rekai Centres residence that houses the Rainbow Wing, is located a block from the Church-Wellesley neighbourhood, also known as "The Village," Toronto's LGBTQ2S+ community hub. Michalik tells The Tyee it was key to replicate the feeling of belonging residents get when they walk through The Village within the framework of the Rainbow Wing."

<https://thetyee.ca/News/2023/03/15/Vancouver-Housing-For-Queer-Seniors/>

Media Continued...

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[Queering Family](#) [Follow](#)

Is this the future of queer elder care?

My stepdad's long-term care facility has a Rainbow Wing for LGBTQ2S+ seniors. It's a first in North America

By [Stéphanie Verge](#) • March 9, 2023 3:53 pm EDT



Credit: Photo by Lito Howse/Xtra; Elham Numan/Xtra

In our new nine-part series, [Queering Family](#), we meet people across North America who are redefining what it means to build and sustain a family. Whether supporting a trans teen coming out, creating a drag

Wellesley Central Place also had one thing going for it that no other residence did: physical proximity to the queer village and a stated interest in welcoming LGBTQ2S+ residents. Nevil had been out his whole adult life, albeit often discreetly. The last thing I wanted for him, or my father, was for their final years together to be spent facing judgment. The Rekai Centres were tackling that issue head-on: they had a “Champions” program, a recurring module for self-selected staff on how to create safer and more inclusive spaces for queer residents and workers. The centres were also working on an all-staff LGBTQ2S+ training program, including overnight sessions for the late shift. Most remarkably, the Wellesley Central Place was slated to open a 25-bed space for queer and trans seniors, dubbed the Rainbow Wing, in June 2022—the first of its kind in North America, according to Barbara Michalik, the executive director of community and academic partnerships and programming at the Rekai Centres."

<https://xtramagazine.com/love-sex/relationships/queer-elder-care-247158>



Media Continued...Spotlight Home from CLRI

A Home with Heart: Rekai Centres' Journey Toward 2SLGBTQI+ Inclusion



At Rekai Centres, inclusion is a living, breathing commitment rooted in community, care, and courageous leadership. As we approach Pride season, the story of [Rekai's Rainbow Wing](#) reminds us that equity work is slow, emotional, deeply human – and absolutely worth the ongoing effort.

Rekai's journey began in 2008, with a conversation that Barbara Michalik, Executive Director, Community, Academic Partnerships and Programming, will never forget. A resident, Gordon Sharpe, confided in Barbara that he was gay and asked her, "Please don't tell anyone." This moment became a catalyst –

igniting Rekai's journey toward 2SLGBTQI+ inclusion.

[A Home with Heart: Rekai Centres' Journey Toward 2SLGBTQI+ Inclusion - Ontario Centres for Learning, Research, and Innovation in Long-Term Care](#)

[Learn more about their journey here](#)

Speaking Engagements

- Public Health Canada
- Ministry of Health and Long Term Care
 - Advantage Ontario & OLTCA
 - Residents Council of Ontario
- Various Long Term Care Home teams
 - CARF Accreditation International
- Winnipeg's Rainbow Resource Centre National Conference
- Academic Partners (University/College)
 - Point Click Care
- Various conferences across Ontario

Supporting 2SLGBTQI+ Education and the creation of a Rainbow Wing

Future opportunities:

Rekai Centres and All Welcoming are planning an in-person or on-line training course on 2SLGBTQI+ residents' inclusion in Long-Term Care agencies (LTC) and strategies how to start a "Rainbow Wing or dedicated space" in LTC dedicated to 2SLGBTQI+ residents.

Objectives:

- Why we need to create safer and inclusive spaces and services
- Foundational understanding (history & partnering)
- Policy creation & change
- Effectively intervening and strategies scenarios
- Allyship
- Creating a GSA "Gender Sexuality Alliance"
- How to create/implementation of a Rainbow Wing and toolkit/guide



If your organization is interested in this training course, please email me at Barbaram@rekaicentres.com.

We will keep you updated on course delivery, materials and cost.

Testimonials

- “We have heard from countless 2SLGBTQI+ seniors who say they have to go back into the closet for fear that their sexual orientation would change the type of care they receive. This is a sad reality for far too many people in long-term care facilities. This needs to change. The Rainbow Wing at Wellesley Central Place is an example of that change. It is a first of its kind but certainly should not be the last. The Wing is already making a positive impact in our community. Creating spaces in which 2SLGBTQI+ seniors feel safe is a key piece to building a more inclusive city, country and world. **-Honourable Marci Ien, Member of Parliament for Toronto Centre and Minister of Women, Gender Equality and Youth.**
- “This is a truly historical day” – **Member of Provincial Parliament Toronto, Ontario Canada MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam**
- “I think it’s very exciting” – **B.V. resident**
- “A sense of culture supported...my family” – **C.S. resident**
- “It’s very comforting and loving. I feel happy and valued and its good to have 2SLGBTQI+ programs to support me” – **J.C. resident**
- “It’s about time” - **G.M. family member**
- “I do think my brother is supported at Wellesley Central Place and the Rainbow Wing is a good idea” – **B.M. family member**
- “The WCP Rainbow Wing provides 2SLGBTQIA+ residents to have a safe space to live authentically, with staff that are trained to take care of their specific needs. It's been long overdue and so important being located near the Church Wellesley village.” – **B.L. staff & champion at the Rekai Centres.**
- “Finally, a Long-Term Care (LTC) facility that is inclusive, affirming, and welcoming of 2SLGBTQI+ people! The Rekai Centres and its Rainbow Wing is the first LTC in Canada that provides a space where 2SLGBTQI+ people can feel that they belong and can live their lives free from homo/bi/transphobia. Thank you Rekai Centres!” – **M.K. Advisory Committee member and educator to the Rainbow Wing**
- “Rekai Centres new wing of 25 designated beds is crucial and necessary to improve and save the lives of 2SLGBTQI+ seniors” – **LeZlie Lee-Kam Committee Advocate.**



Barbara Michalik
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Rekai Centres at Wellesley Central Place & Sherbourne Place
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