

Newsletter

Summer 2026



CUPE Ontario
Pink Triangle
Committee

Comité du
triangle rose
du SCFP Ontario

Chair's corner

A message from Susan Gapka (she/her), Chair, CUPE Ontario Pink Triangle Committee

It has been the best of times, it has been the worst of times for Pink Triangle. We said goodbye to longtime CUPE and committee member Nancy Hanschmann. A CUPE Ontario Pink Triangle award was given posthumously to Nancy at last year's convention and it was a tribute that moved many of us to an emotional connection of solidarity.

We also marched fiercely at Pride events across Ontario, with a determination that our union family strives to achieve. Some marches were disrupted, yet we trudged onward. We fought off 2SLGBTQIA+ hate and protected our most vulnerable members with kindness and love.

Now we prepare to acknowledge the dedication and commitment of CUPE Ontario President Fred Hahn, labour's first gay president of a union in Canada. We hope, Fred, that even in retirement, you will always march with us at Pride.



This change in leadership prompts the question: what is in our future as CUPE Ontario's Pink Triangle committee and as 2SLGBTQIA+ members of CUPE?

Our commitment to advancing 2SLGBTQIA+ union members rights is unstoppable. We pledge to continue to build solidarity with our other equity committees and communities to remind us that an injury to one is an injury to all.



We seek to build a stronger union with the Ontario Federation of Labour to fight the larger struggles we face everyday in the workplace, in the union halls, and in our communities. Let us remember that human rights are workers' rights.

Yet we cannot do this alone. This is a call to action for allies and supporters to join us in the struggle to achieve respect and dignity. In these dangerous times, it will take all of us to resist and overcome the enormous challenges we face.

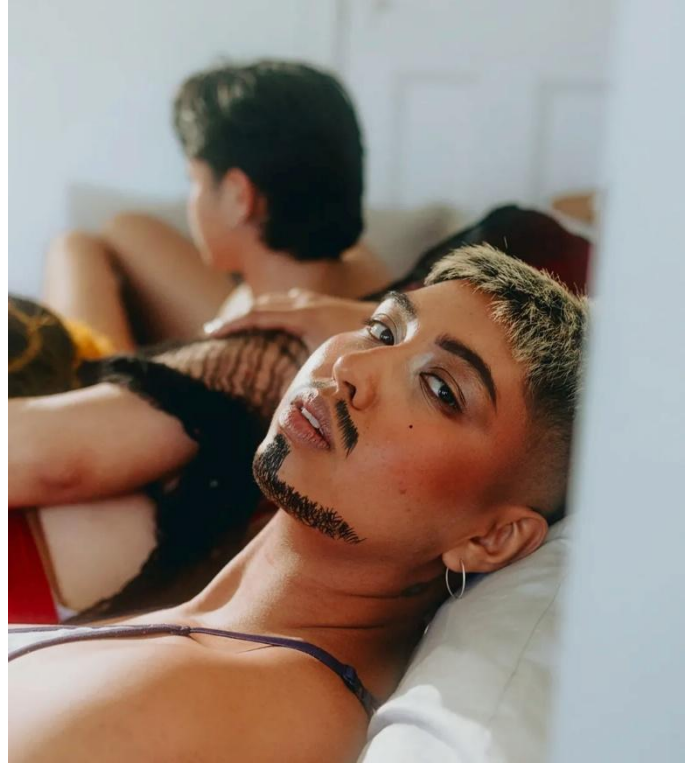
Can we count on you, our fellow CUPE members, to join us and rise up? Are you ready to support us in demanding better wages, working conditions, benefits and pensions? Do you believe that when we fight, we can win? If so, let us celebrate our victories while fighting to build a better world for the younger generation. Are you with us? Then join us in the struggle to build a better world.

What Pride means to me

Pink Triangle committee member Mary Gomes: Pride means living openly and authentically in a world that often expects queer people to shrink themselves. For me, Pride is not just celebration but survival, expression, and community. It reminds me that being visible is an act of courage and that joy itself can be a form of resistance.

Being a drag king has deeply shaped what Pride means to me. Drag has allowed me to explore gender in a creative and affirming way. Through performance, I have been able to challenge traditional ideas of masculinity while gaining confidence and connection with others. Drag gave me space to discover parts of myself that did not always feel welcome in everyday life.

Pride also means remembering its roots in protest and resistance. It began with people who refused to be hidden or erased, and that history matters. To me, Pride is about honoring those who came before us while continuing to show up as we are today. It is about choosing authenticity, supporting one another, and celebrating the freedom to exist fully.



Chris Kaspiris, Pink Triangle Committee newsletter editor:

For me, as a gay man and a member of the Pink Triangle Committee, Pride is far more than a single month of celebration—it is a foundational principle of existence. It is about living openly and authentically in a world that often pressures us to diminish ourselves. Pride is the courage to stand visible and declare that we matter and have a future.

The positive power of Pride is most evident in the sense of community and belonging it fosters. Whether attending large city parades or intimate small-town Pride builds connection, offering a lifeline to those who feel isolated and validating those who feel unseen.

Pride is a vibrant blend of remembrance, resistance, and radical joy. It's a powerful message of love and acceptance that reinforces the idea that change begins at a local level, in backyards and on small-town sidewalks. It is our history, our present joy, and our blueprint for a fairer future where everyone can thrive as their whole, unapologetic self. It is the authentic spirit of solidarity in every single color that makes the fight for an inclusive and compassionate world possible.

What Pride means to me



Pink Triangle committee member Michael Reyes: Pride has always been a paradox when reflecting on what Pride as an idea, a reaction and a celebration actually means to me.

Of course, Pride is a manifestation of resistance to a common struggle. Pride is a celebration of our common survival faced with systemic exclusion.

Pride is a resistance to all the invisible walls of class, culture, ethnicity, social markers and other constructs designed to divide.

Pride is meant to mirror our diversity and reveal the collective understanding that our democratic societies truly must be diverse societies comfortable with the discomfort of pluralism. Comfortable in accepting—not simply tolerating—the 'other.'

For a long time, never seeing myself or people like me reflected, represented or being centred within our city and our country's 2SLGBTQIA+ celebrations, didn't inspire Pride.

For many members of our community who don't fit neatly into a mould. Queer spaces are still riddled with remnants of discrimination among ourselves. Pride brings us a sense that we can all hopefully heal from collective trauma if only for a weekend. In recent years, we have been implored and muscally called on to reflect on the shame our Pride

events are meant to subvert, dismantle and deconstruct. Now more than ever, Pride means a recognition that despite the shame, despite the exclusion from belonging, despite the collective trauma and despite our common dissimilar experiences, our lives are valuable. Not because we are capitalist commodities, but because we are here. And we are also building this country and building our world.

Our lives are invaluable lives. Pride mirrors to all of us how strong we are together and how powerful we actually are as a demographic. We can remind our neighbours that our love and our sex and our passion is part of this mosaic. We can also remind everyone, including ourselves, that we are fighters, we are frontline workers, we take care of the ill and those who are lonely. We are also leaders demanding change on behalf of everyone. We are civic and public servants. We know we are brave. We know we deserve to be loved and heard. We know we must never give up. We believe in our grit. We believe in each other and we amplify all our voices in the struggle for a more just and democratic Canada. A more just and democratic world.

This is what Pride is now becoming for me. It is becoming a signifier that ebbs and flows. Pride will forever mean so much to me, whether it's clear or whether it's murky. Pride keeps me alive. Belonging to CUPE Ontario's Pink Triangle Committee reminds me that questioning what Pride means to me will always be a natural and constructive exercise on my journey as a first-generation Canadian Latino queer/gay worker, surviving in this world, resisting shame as a left-wing pinko every single day I live and beyond. Happy Pride! ¡ Seamos Siempre Orgullosos !

What Pride means to me

Pink Triangle committee member Tyler Hunter: I am proud to represent CUPE 218 in Durham Region and to serve as a new member of the Pink Triangle Committee. Stepping into this role has been a deeply personal milestone, one that continually reminds me that Pride is much more than an annual event; it is a living, breathing movement woven into the fabric of our daily lives.

For me, Pride is the ultimate expression of solidarity. When we look at the history of the pink triangle, we see a symbol violently forced upon our community as a tool of persecution and shame. Today, we wear it as a badge of honour, resilience, and strength. Reclaiming this symbol mirrors the very heart of the labour movement: taking the struggles of the marginalized and forging them into undeniable collective power. It reminds us that our authentic, visible existence is, in itself, an act of resistance.

Pride means recognizing that our fight for workplace rights and human rights are fundamentally intertwined. No worker is truly protected until 2SLGBTQ+ workers are entirely safe from discrimination, harassment, and prejudice on the job. Today, Pride is a fierce call to action. It is an unwavering commitment to ensuring every worker can clock in as their whole, unapologetic self, without fear or compromise.

Pride is also about happiness. It is the act of celebrating our love, our diverse identities, and the chosen families we build in a world that often demands our silence. When we say "solidarity in every single colour," we are honouring the vast, vibrant spectrum of our community—all orientations, gender identities, and expressions. It is the energy of the parades, the laughter we share, and the vividly coloured flags we fly high to unequivocally declare our right to thrive.

As we organize and advocate, I proudly carry the legacy of those trailblazers who fought the hard battles before us. Pride is our history, our present joy, and our blueprint for a fairer future. I am deeply honoured to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Pink Triangle Committee. Together, we don't just celebrate Pride; we work it, we fight for it, and we live it, every single day.



Abolitionist Pride

By Mary Gomes, PTC member



Abolitionist Pride exists as a response to the ways mainstream Pride celebrations have increasingly moved away from their radical and political roots. While corporate Pride events emphasize visibility, sponsorship, and mass appeal, Abolitionist Pride centers liberation, accountability, and collective care. It asks us to question whose safety is prioritized at Pride and whose lives are made more vulnerable when policing and corporate interests dominate queer and trans spaces.

In Toronto, Abolitionist Pride has a long history rooted in resistance to police presence at Pride events. Black, Indigenous, and racialized queer and trans communities have long articulated that policing does not create safety for everyone. For many, police presence at Pride reproduces fear, surveillance, and harm rather than protection. In response, organizers in Toronto have created alternative Pride marches and community led events that reject police involvement and instead prioritize mutual aid, accessibility, and non punitive approaches to harm. These efforts are deeply connected to abolitionist values that view safety as something built through relationships, care, and accountability.

Abolitionist Pride also challenges the growing influence of corporate sponsorship in Pride spaces. When corporations and institutions that contribute to inequality and criminalization are celebrated during Pride, the political purpose of Pride risks being undermined. Abolitionist Pride insists that queer liberation cannot coexist comfortably with systems that continue to harm marginalized communities. It calls us back to Pride as a space of resistance, where justice and dignity are centered over profit and respectability.

Within this context, CUPE Ontario members and the Pink Triangle Committee may wish to consider becoming more actively involved in Abolitionist Pride. As a union representing thousands of workers, including many queer and trans members working in public, social, and community services, CUPE Ontario is uniquely positioned to show meaningful solidarity. Union values such as fairness, dignity, and collective responsibility align strongly with abolitionist principles. Increased involvement could include public support for Abolitionist Pride events, education within the union about abolitionist frameworks, and solidarity with communities impacted by policing and criminalization.



At its best, Abolitionist Pride offers a vision of liberation that is collective rather than individual and transformative rather than symbolic. Greater engagement would help reinforce the idea that labour movements and abolitionist movements are connected through shared commitments to justice, care, and community well being.

Abolitionist Pride in Toronto continues to remind us that Pride is not only about visibility, but about changing the conditions that determine who is protected, who is harmed, and whose lives are valued.

Gender-affirming care

By Coline Bain (she/her), PTC member

For many transgender persons, the ability to transition to their gender is life saving and life affirming. The incongruity of living as a gender that does not match who one really can be painful, debilitating. This feeling stemming out of the incongruity is often labelled as dysphoria. The field of gender affirming care is addressing this dysphoria through many different modalities: counselling, hormone replacement therapies (HRT), and surgically. Not all trans persons employ all the different modalities because of their situation in life, financial resources, and personal preference. It is important to reduce as many barriers as possible so that trans persons can choose the best modalities for their and so that they can live authentically.



In Ontario, OHIP generally does not cover the cost of counselling or medications used in HRT, but surgeries are now covered. In 1998 the Mike Harris Conservative government delisted these surgeries removing them from OHIP coverage. It was through the tireless efforts

of CUPE Members Susan Gaptka, Martine Stackhouse, and other activists, as well as a successful Ontario Court of Human Rights challenge by Stackhouse and two others, supported by CUPE Ontario, that gender affirming care surgeries became relisted in 2008 under the Liberal.

The surgeries that are generally covered are bottom surgery (vaginoplasty and phalloplasty) and top surgery (mastectomies and some breast augmentations). While these surgeries are affirming they don't address some of the most dysphoria causing traits such as facial hair and facial features.

Unions are now filling in the gap where OHIP fails trans people, be it through coverage for psychological counselling, drug benefit plans, or specific gender affirming care benefits. These benefits can cover permanent hair removal, voice training, non-OHIP covered surgeries (such as facial feminization, breast augmentations, chest contouring, tracheal shaves). The Public Service Alliance of Canada has achieved \$75000 lifetime coverage and CUPE Local 79 the largest local in Canada has achieved 10,000 lifetime coverage.

We need to build on these wins, achieve more gender affirming care packages into collective agreements, increase the coverage within existing packages, and ultimately fight to increase the public coverage under OHIP.

Make your Pride plans



The Ontario Federation of Labour has a list of Pride events taking place across the province. Visit ofl.ca to find an event near you and join the fun!



PTC at the Day of Pink Gala

By Mallory Imrie, PTC Member

Members of the Pink Triangle Committee proudly attended the International Day of Pink Gala on April 8, 2026, at the Toronto Reference Library. It was an inspiring evening celebrating diversity, inclusion and community.

Marking the 20th anniversary of the movement, this year's theme "ECHO: Celebrating 20 years of Resistance, Education and Love." The night highlighted both progress and the ongoing fight against bullying, discrimination, and hate. The event brought together activists, community leaders, and allies committed to creating safer and more inclusive spaces.

Featured guests included Edith Dumont, Kendall Gender, and Martin Boyce, along with a performance Tempo Chorus.

The Gala served not only as a celebration but also a call to action reminding all in attendance that the fight for equity and inclusion continues.



LEAF Gala

Fun times on April 23 when members of the Pink Triangle Committee joined other CUPE members at the LEAF Gala at the Carlu in Toronto

The Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) is a charity that advances gender equality through law and has won some landmark victories for 2SLGBTQIA+ and workplace rights. Its past work includes having sexual orientation deemed a protected ground under the law and supporting unions' challenge to Bill 124.

CUPE Ontario Secretary-Treasurer Yolanda McClean gave a rousing speech at the April event and helped put LEAF's fundraising over its target.

