

Interview with a local activist



(photo taken from pride.lv)

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(Latvia)

• What do you think of people joining pride for the sake of the party?

Only the best! Glad that they came, glad that they had enough courage. Just because a person belongs to a special group, they are not obligated to be an activist. People who come to party bring joy, pleasure of entertainment, leave their money to the organization. With time, maybe, some of them will become activists, or simply become more open in their daily lives, which is crucial for LGBT cases to move forward. We must be visible in all our diversity!

• How to force yourself to continue working in activism even if it appears to be failing? How not to burn out?

I don't think that you need to force yourself. If the activism needs to be forced on, then maybe it's better to take a break. If there is a feeling that things are not going forward, you need to look at the situation in your country and the world in a longer-term perspective – the world in which we live has become better for LGBT people than it was 20 or 50 years ago.

What's important is that you don't work alone and don't try to do too much/take too much. You need your team to share with, who can support each other and share tasks. Everyone is allowed to rest.

You need to set small goals that are easy to achieve, and you can celebrate it together, not just one, very remote goal. And above all, it should be remembered that although the task is difficult and will take a long time, it does not mean that you can't have fun! In order not to burn, it is very important to maintain a sense of humor, joy and lightness!

• Why did you take responsibility and become an activist?

It was clear to me that at the given time and moment there was no one else who could do it for me. I had a safe environment – my life mate, good work, friends who supported me. I had nothing to lose because all the people important to me already knew I was a lesbian. In addition, I had a good experience from work in another field of activism, and a lot of good contacts to use.

• Why is it important to be brave (because activism requires courage)?

Not all activism demands courage, but courage is a very good thing if you want to change the world? We need to remember that many of those people who have really left traces in world history were both fearful and courageous (because courage is not fearlessness, courage is the ability to do something even though you are as scared as a hare) and were considered to be crazy. The courage of an individual can also inspire and encourage others.

• How do you think it can be agreed with the government to ensure the rule of law? How do we create a dialogue?

With continued and relentless work. Explain again and again what we want, and why. Base your arguments with facts and statistics, examples from other countries. To show the benefits of change for society as a whole. Participate in all the talks and debates that are being offered and try to keep peace and a smile. In this way, the adversaries will look madder than us, and it will be easier for neutral viewers to feel sympathy. Try to make the case that there are as many people speaking on behalf of the LGBT organisation as possible, not just the same "faces". To show examples of how society has changed on many other issues (women's rights, children's rights, etc.) without anyone getting worse from it. Talk to politicians in (almost) all parties, individually and without the presence of the media. Seek allies in a society that is willing to speak on our behalf – celebrities, opinion leaders, etc.

• How to change the vision of a generation of Soviet times for LGBT +?

This is not the main task. Generations are gradually changing, it is more important to change the vision of younger people, because they will be voters for longer and shape our future society. You should not try to change the views of all people, just the majority.

• Is the adverse treatment of LGBT + a consequence of our society's treatment of sexuality as such?

This is A VERY complicated and broad question that cannot be answered in a couple of sentences. The short answer is yes, of course. It's all related. Especially the older generation was very worried when someone is speaking publicly about things that make them feel uncomfortable because they are accustomed to not speaking of such things. People's own experiences, failed lives, frustration and fear also play their part. Regret what hasn't been and what happened. Fear for their children and grandchildren. There is no change in public opinion on LGBT issues without changing the general perception of sexuality, cohabitation, relationships, women and men in society, etc.

STEP
4
CHANGE

This interview was conducted by the Latvian team of participants of the Erasmus+ youth exchange Step 4 Change as part of their preparation.