

NEWS RELEASE

June 9, 2020

Safe Spaces Re-Imagined Through Educational Partnerships

A growing educational partnership is helping some of our province's most vulnerable youth connect in safe spaces while they must be apart. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and the [Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity \(CCGSD\)](#) have come together again to offer students a virtual opportunity to attend workshops and sharing sessions. Building on the relationship formed earlier in 2019 with successful in-person events, **Virtual Forum: Free to Be Me 2020** offers an opportunity to learn and connect, re-imagined through the District's [Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation \(CDLI\)](#).

"Students have been away from their school communities since the middle of March but their safety and well-being has been our focus ever since, particularly for those who may feel the most alone," said Tony Stack, CEO/Director of Education of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District. "The solid partnership we have built with CCGSD in recent years is not only helping to grow understanding and respect within our school communities, but now, when it is most important, it is helping us reach out and let those students know we are with them."

Registration for the student-focused workshops and sharing sessions is already underway, with more than 40 junior high and high school students attending the kick-off event last week. Two more student sessions are being offered and a Keynote address for students and staff with Rahim Thawer of Affective Consulting will take place on June 11. Educators will also be able to avail of an opportunity to connect in a session on Sports Inclusion (June 17). Over 100 teachers have already registered. More information on these events can be found in the backgrounder below.

"For CCGSD, serving our communities means going where we are invited to help create safe environments for everyone," noted Cameron Aitken, Executive Director (Acting) for the Centre. "During the global pandemic, that has evolved from in-person conferences and workshops into working even harder to find and support youth currently displaced from their usual support networks. We are so proud of our strong partnership with Newfoundland and Labrador schools to help expand programming in new and dynamic ways and our collective willingness to meet students where they are. Particularly during Pride Month, it is so important that we overcome the physical distance to create and provide safe digital spaces for all of us to collaborate, express challenges, and gain inspiration from speakers and peers attending."

Students and staff interested in attending are able to access specific information from their school administration.

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BACKGROUNDER**Free to Be Me 2020 (Newfoundland and Labrador)****Virtual Forum: Free To Be Me 2020**

Tuesday, June 9 and Tuesday, June 16

Student Participation

Separate **Grades 7-9** and **Grades 10-12** sessions.

Students will require a CDLI account to access their sessions.

Please note: Registration will close 3:00 p.m. the day prior to each session.

Keynote Address: [Affective Consulting's Rahim Thawer](#)

Thursday, June 11

Student and Teacher Participation

Rahim Thawer is a clinical social worker and psychotherapist in Toronto with a sex-positive, anti-oppressive and trauma-informed approach. Mr. Thawer also facilitates anti-racism/ anti-oppression, trauma informed, and 2SLGBTQ+ mental health training for organizations throughout Canada.

Students will access the event through CDLI, while educators will be provided with a link to attend.

Educator Session: 2SLGBTQ+ Inclusion in Sports

Wednesday, June 17

Educator Participation

Based on the CCGSD [Sports Inclusion Program](#) in Ontario, this session is developed for our province to engage coaches, sport associations, teams, schools, gyms, and other groups promoting physical activity and sport. The workshop's intent is to help make sports a more accepting and inclusive pastime for all athletes, regardless of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. The session will include an overview of gender and sexual diversity and the history of homophobia and transphobia in sports, while also offering a conversation on increasing 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion and visibility within sport.