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?Pride rally? held in response to ?freedom rally? protests downtown

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Members of Shelburne's LGBTQ+ community are speaking out against transphobic and homophobic rhetoric they say is being used in the bi-weekly Shelburne ?Freedom Rally'.

At the latest local ?Freedom Rally? on Sept. 10, groups of protesters once again gathered on either side of Shelburne's Main Street, waiving Canadian flags and hold signs with scattered messages on mandates, vaccines, and Netherland farmers.

Against the backdrop of the tailgate party for ?freedom', a small number of Shelburne's LGBTQ+ community stood outside Town Hall hosting their very own ?Pride Rally?, a counter protest.

Ethan Praxis, organizer of the ?Pride Rally', said the event was a positive alternative to the protests happening every other weekend and a time to highlight the hateful rhetoric aimed towards the LGBTQ+ community.

?There's a whole homophobic, transphobic and hateful undertone and it's been driving them since the beginning,? said Praxis. ?I just got sick of it. I started making complaints and I encourage other people to do it too.?

Speaking with the Free Press, Praxis pointed to a sign attached to the back window of a mini-van that read ?Today I Identify As A Toaster', as one example of the hate being directed at the LGBTQ+ community.

?That's a reference to people who are transgendered or gender fluid,? explained Praxis, who identifies as non-binary. ?They're basically saying you can be whatever you want, it's not real and you're not really two-spirted.?

Initially beginning in February with the Freedom Convoy, the ?Freedom Rally' protests in Shelburne have become a reoccurring weekend event, led by organizer Jeremy Glass. Over the months more than a dozen ?freedom' protests have been held in the downtown core leading to complaints from businesses and residents.

After months of the ongoing protest, Praxis is urging that more needs to be done and that the Town of Shelburne needs to talk a stance.

?The homophobic, transphobic and racist rhetoric they're using inevitably leads to physical violence against people like us,? said Praxis.

According to the Dufferin OPP, no arrest or criminal charges in relation to the freedom protests have been laid.

?The role of Dufferin OPP in these demonstrations is to ensure public safety and to keep the peace, at which we have been very successful,? said Dufferin OPP Media Relations.

Officer, Terr-Ann Pencarinha. ?The OPP has maintained public safety and would investigate any criminal wrong doing in accordance with legislated responsibilities.?

Praxis also noted the impact the ?freedom rally' is having on the younger LGBTQ+ community in Shelburne.

?It can be detrimental. Being younger and to see this kind of thing is going to put you in a very difficult place, and how do you process that?? said Praxis. ?It breaks my heart to think they're seeing those signs and it could keep them or put them back in the

closet.?

The Town of Shelburne is in the process of seeking outside legal advice on how to respond to the ongoing ?freedom' protests in the downtown core.

?We need to do more to counter this kind of nonsense,? said Praxis.