

## Walk the Talk Award Entrant: Duncan Matthews, RainbowYOUTH

Since Duncan Matthews started work as a volunteer at RainbowYOUTH six years ago, the organisation has grown in leaps and bounds, and now provides a place for the collective strength of diversity to thrive.

The organisation boasts 12 support groups for gender diverse youth across the country, a dedicated board, and a strong staff of 10 people.

RainbowYOUTH has also grown far beyond Auckland and has become more nationally focused, due to Duncan's belief in social media and brand presence.

RainbowYOUTH is a charitable organisation that focuses on supporting queer and gender diverse (LGBTIQ) youth in New Zealand. Their mission statement is: "To provide unbiased information and education regarding sexuality, gender and identity to everyone in the community, in order to foster understanding and acceptance of diversity. To provide support, information and advocacy services to queer and questioning youth, their friends, and whānau."

In Duncan's position he oversees projects within RainbowYOUTH, is the first contact for affiliates and parties interested in collaboration or donating, and is the face of RainbowYOUTH in every sense of the word.

Duncan provides an atmosphere of trust and respect. Being a young man of the LGBTIQI community himself, his experiences also help him to relate to those who work within RainbowYOUTH. It is a personal journey for him to see the organisation excel and grow, and his constant good humour, support, and feedback to his team make for a fertile environment in which this happens.

He has earned the friendship and respect of his entire staff by working hard to show them that he truly believes in RainbowYOUTH's ability to make a positive and lasting impact on attitudes towards the LGBTIQ community in New Zealand. Along with this, he embodies this belief in the way he motivates and guides RainbowYOUTH's staff and volunteers. "Many people who come to RainbowYOUTH are encouraged by the atmosphere of trust and respect enough to go on to become volunteers," says RainbowYOUTH Grant Coordinator Velvl Ryder. "Those who volunteer feel encouraged to dedicate more and more time to help RainbowYOUTH prosper and grow."

"Staff and volunteers feel comfortable and safe expressing their opinions and ideas at work, knowing that they will be heard and their experiences not brushed aside."

Duncan is knowledgeable in all aspects of the organisation's projects and procedures, having worked on many himself.

He has earned the friendship and respect of his entire staff by working hard to show them that he truly believes in RainbowYOUTH's ability to make a positive and lasting impact on attitudes towards the LGBTIQ community in New Zealand.

“Duncan’s work behind the scenes has been invaluable in creating this confidence and trust in the workplace; allowing everyone to be who they are, and supporting every type of diversity to build our collective strength up and up, every day and every week,” Velvl says.

While there is a hierarchy within the organisation for business purposes, the day to day running of events at RainbowYOUTH under Duncan is very equal. Mentorship and training is provided for everyone, and continues to be ongoing as new practices are put into place to propel RainbowYOUTH forward. Duncan encourages everyone to bring their own expertise to the table, and own it and share it with the rest of the team.

Everyone’s experience is valid at RainbowYOUTH, regardless of their age or resume. Often, people collaborate within the organisation successfully because they don’t feel constrained to remain in the position they were hired for.

RainbowYOUTH has also been part of a venture to attract an international ILGA event to Wellington next year. Working with Intersex Trust Aotearoa New Zealand (Itanz), and the Tiwhanawhana Trust, the three groups make a successful bid for Wellington to host the 2018 International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association World Conference. (Tiwhanawhana is a takatāpui community group based in Wellington that welcomes people of diverse sexualities and gender identity). The event is being supported by the Wellington Regional Economic Development Agency and Tourism New Zealand.