

Our Compass

Created in 2009, *Our Compass* is a short documentary video that tells the previously unheard stories of a group of young, queer-identified Torontonians who are also labelled as having intellectual disabilities. This diverse group comes together at Compass—a social group created for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth at Griffin Centre—where they are offered a support group, a social network, and a safe place to explore their identities. In the documentary, the participants engage in discussion of topics such as dating, sex, battling stigma and coming out, while preparing for professional portraits that will showcase the feature of their identities that they are most proud of. Power, freedom, hope and love are a few of the words of inspiration that the youth of *Our Compass* impart to the audience.

Our Compass has utilized a collaborative, participatory media making approach, which honours the creativity and lived experiences of youth, to create an educational tool that transforms how media is used to tell stories.

The photographs presented here are a selection of images used in the video. As described by Tyson:

We each had a portrait taken and each of us chose our own theme for the portrait and everybody chose something that's important to them and expressed something about them.

Authors

Tess Vo

Griffin Centre
North York, ON

Correspondence

tvo@griffin-centre.org

Keywords

youth,
LGBTQ,
photovoice,
visual methodology,
intellectual and
developmental disabilities

Acknowledgement

Our Compass, presented by Griffin Centre's ReachOUT Program, was written by Ryan Firestone, C.J. Fung, Rainbow Hunt, Josh Palmer, Romeo Pierre, Ruby Rowan, Skyler Siao, Tyson Purdy Smith, Wayne Koltchigin, Tess Vo, and produced and directed by Tess Vo. Photography credit for the images presented in this article: Patrick Struys.

Our Compass was produced with financial support from Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Children and Youth Mental Health Fund: Year 4-Innovations Fund, The Ontario Trillium Foundation, with additional support from the City of Toronto, AIDS Prevention Community Investment Program.

Griffin Centre promotes positive change for vulnerable youth and adults with mental health challenges and/or developmental disabilities and their families. We are dedicated to delivering innovative services and developing creative partnerships that enhance lives and communities.

Within Griffin Centre, ReachOUT is a creative, inclusive & accessible program for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer youth and adults in the Greater Toronto Area. Activities include drop-in groups, community outreach, art & skills exchange, counselling, training and consultation. We offer safe spaces that reflect the diversity of our queer and trans communities.

Reference

Vo, T. (Producer/Director). (2009). *Our Compass* [Video]. (Available from Griffin Centre, 24 Silverview Drive, North York, ON, M2M 2B2)



Hope. *Hope is an essential human need just as much as food or air or water or shelter.*

—Tyson



Sexy. *I wanna look Sexy so I can have a more easier chance of dating.*

—Ryan



Creativity. *I have intellectual disability which is not stopping me from being who I want to be and it doesn't make me feel no different from anybody else.*

—Rainbow



Confusing. *You don't know which direction you're going in, whether you're going north, whether you're going south, whether you're going east, west, you know? I don't really know if I like girls or do I like guys, it's confusing.*

—Wayne



Love. *The person that I love, I want to be with them forever no matter what.*

—Skyler



Freedom. *Freedom it's important to me, 'cause I think everyone deserve and have the right to love who they want to be with.*

—C.J.



Power. *So what power means to me is, I can be anything I put my mind to be.*

—Romeo



Pride. *Pride to everybody in the LGBTQ community is a large event where queer people like myself get to express themselves.*

—Josh