

Martin Irvine waits for a nurse to return with a needle at a lab in Belleville prior to a blood test. Irvine is transgender and will require a testosterone shot once a week for the rest of his life. Before he can begin hormone therapy though blood tests must be taken.



Irvine holds a picture of himself taken four years earlier before he came out as transgender.



Irvine has blood drawn as part of a series of tests before being able to begin hormone replacement therapy. The blood tests help determine how much testosterone Irvine should be prescribed, also if there are any diseases which may hinder transition.



Irvine and his grandmother embrace at a clinic in Peterborough, Ont. after Irvine received his first testosterone shot. Irvine traveled an hour and a half from Belleville to Peterborough to receive his first shot of testosterone to begin physically transitioning.

Transitioning in Quinte

Photos and story by Adam Dietrich

After a three-month hiatus the return of a popular youth group means much needed support and services will be returning to the Quinte region for transgender youth. Transformum, a youth focused transgender support group has started meeting once again in Belleville.

The return is good news for trans youth like Martin Irvine, 19, a trans man from Trenton who is studying journalism at Loyalist College. "The group is really supportive, they're like a family," says Irvine, who started attending meetings last year when the group first started.

Transformum was created to compliment the services offered by Say OutLoud! a weekly LGBT youth group that meets on Tuesdays in Belleville. The group began after a few local activists decided that the region needed outreach services following the high profile suicide of Ottawa teen Jamie Hubley in October 2011. Hubley killed himself after being bullied for being gay.

Around this time Eric Hargreaves, a local LGBT activist began trying to organize a support group for local youth. "The group was small originally, but we had some good facilitators," said Hargreaves. "As the group grew we began to get requests for a place for trans-youth to talk," said Hargreaves. "While trans issues have long been considered gay issues they're not really all the same and we knew the trans youth needed their own space," said Hargreaves

Hargreaves believes this provides an essential service for an under represented demographic of society.

In a study conducted in San Francisco by their police department, they estimate 2-5 per cent of the population is transgender. In a city like Belleville that's about 1000-2500 people. For trans people like Irvine, resources like Transformum and Say OutLoud! have been invaluable.

"It's such a supportive community," said Irvine. "They're the only reason I knew which doctor to go to, to get testosterone."

The group itself however, operates under a thin veil of secrecy. The exact location, time and date are kept private.

"It is necessary in order to provide a safe space for participants," said Irvine.

"Homophobia is a problem for us with Say OutLoud! and Transformum, which is why we ask people to contact the facilitators before we give out the location," said Hargreaves about their security measures. "With the trans group it is even more important to have these safeguards because transphobia can really cause some people to act out."

Despite the concern neither group has had a major incident yet. Attitudes towards LGBT people and issues seem to be changing in the Belleville area for the better though according to Hargreaves and Irvine.

One public example is this past August when Belleville hosted its first ever gay pride parade. Although Pride in the Park has been

an annual event at Zwicks park for ten years, this was the first year streets were closed to celebrate pride.

"We had no issues whatsoever from the community," said Hargreaves. "We had a great turnout. I counted at least 300 people and there were many more, lining the street."

Hargreaves doesn't believe it was hate that kept Pride in the Park off the streets for a decade. "It's not that people hate gay people and trans people, it's that they're ignorant of the issues and the reality."

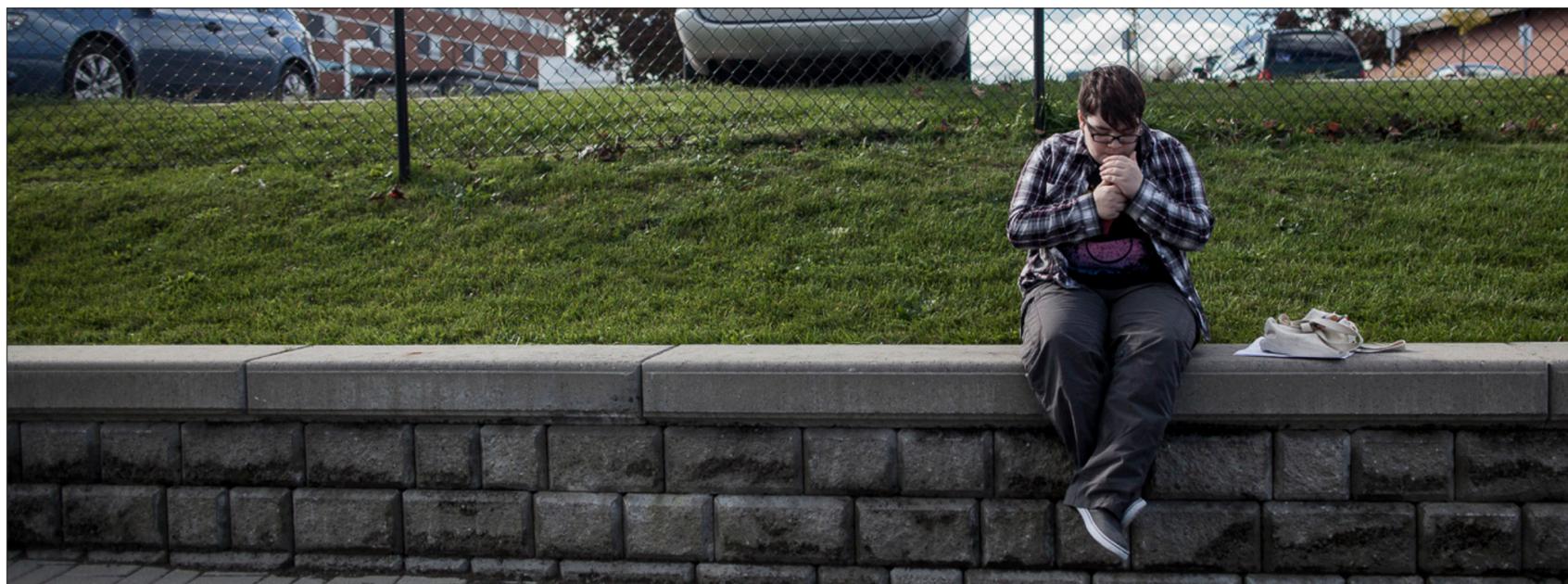
"That's why we say that Say OutLoud! is GLBTQA" said Hargreaves. "The 'A' is for 'Allies'. We are always welcoming for those looking to learn more."

Hargreaves said the best way to find LGBT support services in Quinte is to go online and look up Say OutLoud! or PFLAG Quinte, another resource which offers support services for LGBT people.

Hargreaves said public service campaigns like 2011's 'It Gets Better,' which featured LGBT celebrities offering video recorded messages of hope to LGBT youth have helped to expose homophobia and bridge dialogue.

"I had high school guidance counselors, and even parents contacting me through Say OutLoud! asking for help with their trans-youth," said Hargreaves. So the facilitators found their own space and a place to make it happen.

"I think for a lot of trans youth it is very lonely growing up," said Hargreaves, "That's the point of the group, to let youth know, you are not alone."



Irvine lights a cigarette outside of a clinic in Peterborough where he will begin receiving testosterone shots.