



P.O. Box 253 • Bracebridge, ON P1L 1T6

1-866-659-LGBT (5428) • muskokapride@gmail.com

For Immediate Release

## The first Muskoka Queer Film Festival: an online success

MUSKOKA, ONTARIO - May 25, 2020 - About **300 people** joined the Virtual Cinema hall of the Muskoka Queer Film Festival last weekend. The Festival lasted for three days, splitting 12 films selected by the Jury out of the three dozen submissions into sessions combined with online conversations. Ten directors joined the discussions within the Muskoka Queer Film Festival on cinematography, the power of art and how it can help to overcome discrimination for queer people worldwide. The dates of the Festival were aligned with the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia which the world celebrates on May 17. Representatives of Muskoka Pride joined the online discussion on this day to share with the public some outcomes of the Festival and their plans for the future.

*“There was a big challenge to hold our Festival in the middle of the lockdown, but I believe we did a great job and achieved our goals. We raised great attention to Muskoka all over Canada and in other countries and we’ve got a great response from the public which shows us that the event is needed in the region,”* – says **Mervin Taylor-Morin, President of Muskoka Pride.**

MQFF issued two awards. The Film **Festival Favourite Jury Award**, presented by the MQFF Selection Committee, went down to **Mississauga** to **Brandon Nicoletti**, the director of the beautiful musical video **“So Beautiful”**. The short film tells the story of a teenage boy who experiences passion, heartache, and self discovery when he falls in love with one of his male classmates.

**The Audience Choice Award** went to **Switzerland**: MQFF’s public voted for a stunning story of a young refugee from Afghanistan. **Nicolas Greinacher’s “Ayaneh”** draws a drama around her relationship with a new girlfriend and growing resistance from her religious family.

*“It was a pure pleasure to stream the Festival online, it felt almost like we were in a real cinema. Our team managed to ensure a good quality of the video material we were broadcasting, so our festival goers would get a full effect of watching a piece in a theatre. From the technical perspective it was a great success,”* – a conclusion from **Michelle Emson and Olena Semenova of Sanctuary Studios**, a multi-media production company based in Muskoka, who are also international human rights activists and filmmakers, - *“We managed to attract viewers from Muskoka, as well as from other Canadian cities and regions, the United States and even Europe”*.



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The Muskoka Queer Film Festival is a collaboration of Muskoka Pride, Sanctuary Studios Inc., and the Muskoka Lakes Chamber of Commerce, and is sponsored by the Canadian Experiences Fund delivered through FedNor. The MQFF Festival Committee expresses considerable gratitude to FedNor and the Parry Sound Muskoka Community Network for their support.

The festival team is keen to develop the festival for 2021 and is looking forward to inviting all of our supporters to join MQFF next year.

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**Media Contact:**

Shawn Forth  
Secretary & Promotions  
Muskoka Pride  
705-706-2500 (cell)  
[muskokapridefestival@hotmail.com](mailto:muskokapridefestival@hotmail.com)

**About LGBT Pride Events** – Pride events celebrate lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) culture. Most pride events occur annually with many taking place in June to commemorate the Stonewall Riots in New York City on June 28, 1969. The first Pride march happened in 1970. Today Pride events are held in cities and towns all over the world.

**About Muskoka Pride** - Muskoka Pride is a volunteer group that formed in 2009, whose purpose is to increase awareness of the LGBTQ+ community of Muskoka and to create opportunities for inclusivity within Muskoka that overcome heterosexism and homo/bi/trans-phobia, providing a safe community for LGBT people. Muskoka Pride hosts the annual Muskoka Pride Picnic on the Sunday before the Civic Holiday weekend and Pride Week activities throughout Muskoka. A conference is held each fall, and regular social events happen throughout the year.

**About the Canadian Experiences Fund**

The Canadian Experiences Fund (CEF) supports communities across Canada as they create and enhance tourism products, facilities and experiences. Delivered through Canada's Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), this two-year Fund helps Canada's tourism sector innovate and grow by providing targeted investments based on regional priorities (including inclusiveness, especially for the LGBTQ2 community).

Photos attached:

- "So Beautiful" poster & Director – Brandon Nicoletti, Ontario  
[www.sobeautifulmusicvideo.com](http://www.sobeautifulmusicvideo.com)
- "Ayaneh" poster & Director – Nicolas Greinacher, Switzerland <http://ayaneh.com>
- MQFF festival logo