

Using an example from your own experience or from a recent news item, what could you and your friends do as ordinary citizens to help someone who has been targeted because of his/her race, sexual orientation, gender or age?

Discrimination of those who are considered "other" has been fundamental in the history of human existence. Within modern society such discrimination is unacceptable; however, many people still struggle for acceptance and equality under the law. Racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia and a myriad of other modes of discrimination are among our societies larger problems. As our world has become more interconnected and people have become more free to express themselves, who was once a distant or even unknown "other" is now revealed to be a neighbor or colleague. This, to some, has created friction. Some find this new world of inclusivity uncomfortable. This can be seen through the growing political support for those who wish to reverse this connectedness. Anti-immigration sentiment in both Britain and the US has led to political shift to the right. Increasing racial tension in the United States with the recent immigrant ban from Muslim countries, and controversy over the Black Lives Matter movement has done little to ease tensions. With the election of Donald Trump, many people associated with the LGBT2Q+ community feel as though their freedoms are also threatened. Women's groups in the States have voiced their concerns over increasing anti-choice legislation, and the gutting of Planned Parenthood, through public marches and protests.

It appears to me that many of the efforts to advance social equality have done little but to provoke a backlash response from conservatives. These social movements have failed to reach and persuade those who disagree with their cause. In other words, the majority of these inclusivity movements have ultimately been self-gratifying echo chambers. The way in which these movements have been structured have not brought people together, but have created a more divisive society. The rise of Black Lives Matter resulted in both an All Lives Matter, and the farcical Blue Lives Matter, backlash. Rather than bringing people into a conversation to address grievances, people have become annoyed and divided. It has been a failure on both sides to not truly listen and to try and empathize with the other. It is very easy for people to simply choose a side and to never stray from their original opinion, or allow it to be challenged. With each action made by one side the other reacts with anger and an immediate repulsion. With this attitude no real progress toward inclusivity and equality can be made.

Fundamentally, real social change does not happen from social movements, but happens between individuals who have the patience to understand one another. If a person recognizes something they consider to be unjust, they have to address it from a position of conversation. Injustice is combated through person to person dialogue. Although not as publically lauded as they should be, small grassroot efforts drive the real progress towards equality and fairness. In my personal experience primary and secondary education have been the critical years to introduce people to the concepts of diversity, equality, and social justice. In school there are many opportunities to educate people to all the wonderful diversities we see in our society. Examples of this are the Queer-Straight Alliance Clubs, found in almost every

high school in my city, which provides a space for students to see and talk with queer and straight students alike. The alliance allows for perhaps homophobic students to have an opportunity to see these people as their peers and not "other". Developing groups like this is something anyone can start, and makes a noticeable difference in the mindset of people and helps create an environment that prevents people from being targeted.

Another example of how my school community has made real effort to fight discrimination is through hosting a Pow Wow. The Pow Wow is held in a public space, and everyone, regardless of race or tradition, is invited. This exposure connects those of traditional First Nations, Inuit and Métis (FNIM) communities to those that do not share, or perhaps understand or even value, those traditions. By hosting Pow Wow and freely sharing their traditions and culture, FNIM communities feel less like "others" and rather just like another part of the greater community. With each Pow Wow a person attends, the less acceptable it becomes for that person to discriminate against FNIM communities. Everyone becomes more comfortable with one another.

Although these are great initiatives that have been created by my (and other) communities to help celebrate and support minorities, sometimes there are moments when as an individual a person has the opportunity to make a change. There are often media reports of average individuals who offer to escort women wearing a hijab in order to protect them from insults and violence. If someone is being attacked for who they are and can't defend themselves, doing something as simple as asking the attacker why they think it's okay for them to attack somebody can be enough to defuse the situation. If the aggressor continues with their harassment, the bystander can bring the situation to the attention of teachers, managers, or law enforcement to get the harassment to stop. Everyone has a right to be free of discrimination, and if someone sees it happening, they should feel empowered to get involved.

The struggle against discrimination will by no means be won overnight. The women's movement began in the mid 1800's, and women have yet to receive full equality in North America. Homophobia and racism, in particular Islamophobia, are still rampant in our society. People are naturally fearful of the "other", someone they don't understand or have no real experience with. This fear can only be overcome slowly, and on a small scale where there is genuine interaction and exposure, to make that which once was "other" to become what is same. It should be understood that people are not the same as one another, but that people come to understand and accept one another within the community, despite differences. Examples such as a Queer-Straight Alliance, and inclusive Pow Wow's, are great examples of small grassroots initiatives that introduce people to different ideas in a non-threatening, gradual way. Even the individual can do small things to influence someone's world view and to support a victim when they feel empowered to do so. Ultimately it is the small things that will move the world to a place of greater acceptance.