

Today is big.
Like really big yeah?
Even I can feel it.

I love this space.
I love that it is here, that it is real.
That you can reach out and touch it.

I love that people feel safe here
That they want to be here
And that when they are here, they don't want to leave

I love that we, as a community, have claimed it
And made it our own.

I also love, that on a day like today,
It's a space we can be so generous with - a space that we can share.

It's wonderful to see so many people here today who are friends, supporters and allies. And it's particularly wonderful to see so many people who, perhaps don't see themselves as part of our community at all, but who are nonetheless keen to help make the ACT a safer, fairer and more just place for sex and gender diverse people.

We, as trans or intersex people, have always "had" spaces.
But they've been borrowed spaces, hidden spaces, secret spaces.
We've been careful in them, felt scared in them, and never really felt like we've belonged in them.

Life changing moments have been shared in hushed voices at the back of cafes all over Canberra.
But these are temporary spaces.
And as soon as we physically leave them
It's like we were never there at all.
And so we appear to be
completely invisible.
Which means that every new person feels like they are doing this stuff for the very first time
All Alone.

One of the things I love about this space
Is that it brings with it its own history.
A history that we've been able to salvage, not because there is anything particularly special about it.
But purely by chance.

On 1st September 1996, 15 years ago.
A young trans guy, (who thought he was the only tranny in Canberra)
Celebrated his transition.
right here.

In this house.

Witnessed by family and friends

He planted a small seedling in the front yard to mark the moment.

To claim a space.

To make it real.

The importance of the 15 year old gum tree in our front yard,
that you all walked past to get here.

Is not, for me, anything about that particular story.

The importance of that tree in the front yard

is that it symbolises the thousands of other stories that we have lost.

And it's not just stories that we've lost.

It's also people.

The broader ACT community has lost people.

People who have an incredible capacity to contribute to our society

A capacity that has never been welcomed, and certainly never harnessed.

Our own community has lost people too

People who distance themselves from us

Because they find it safer

To be silent and to try to "just fit in"

It's really important that we acknowledge this.

Because despite the really hard work that we've been doing for almost ten years,

And despite how momentous all this is,

These are still only very early days.

We are, in many ways, still only taking very small and very tentative steps

on what is sure to be a very long journey.

There are people in our community who are very fearful and very cautious.

There are people who have concerns about us even having an official opening of these premises.

And I understand their fear – because the stigma and discrimination and violence directed towards
trans and intersex people is mind blowing.

And it's very very real.

But that's exactly what we need to change.

And we change that, I think, by starting to expect more from other people, rather than less.

This is not a space to hide away in.

It's not a space to segregate ourselves from the broader community, or from one another.

This is a place where we can take up space.
Where we can practice feeling entitled to take up space.

Where we can be who we really are.
Where isolated people can start to connect with one another.

Where we can have conversations that we've never been able to have before
Conversations that include our partners our friends our supporters and our allies

This is a space where we can share *all* our stories.
Where there is room to share the stories of hope, the stories of joy, the stories of success.

A space where we can truly celebrate
Celebrate ourselves and each other
in all our wonderful and fabulous diversity

The difference that this space has already made to our community is quite amazing.
It's like a whole community is building before our very eyes.

We're living it, breathing it, creating it.
As we speak.

It's inspiring.
And it's a truly beautiful thing to be a part of.

Thankyou all for sharing it with us.