Becoming an Ally

What is an Ally?

Allies are people who recognize the unearned privilege they receive from society’s patterns of injustice and take responsibility for changing these patterns. Allies include men who work to end sexism, white people who work to end racism, heterosexual people who work to end heterosexism, able-bodied people who work to end ableism, and so on. Part of becoming an ally is also recognizing one’s own experience of oppression. For example, a white woman can learn from her experience of sexism and apply it in becoming an ally to people of color, or a person who grew up in poverty can learn from that experience how to respect others’ feelings of helplessness because of a disability. This is the definition of an ally given by Anne Bishop

People acting as Allies work to support diverse groups in our community with which they may not necessarily identify as members.

How do I get started?

**1. Know the Issues**   
Question: What do you already know about the history of diversity and ally work in your community -- the obstacles, triumphs and current issues?

Answer: Knowing a group's history is important to understanding their positions and being a responsible and aware ally. Read up on the history, look up an organization's web site or stop by their office. Find resources that explain the values and goals guiding a group's efforts toward social justice.

**2. Know Yourself**Question: What has contributed to your interest in working as an ally? What background are you coming from? What is your social location?

Answer: Everyone has his or her own culture and cultures have a history of interaction. Research and reflection will help you to identify where you're coming from in relation to the group of people you are interested in working with. Do some research about the kind of ally this group is seeking. Reflect on what it is you hope to see develop through your efforts of support. Be sure to address the societal and personal rewards of your commitment.

**3. Build Relationships**   
Question: What is your personal connection to the group you would like to work with? Who do you already know that is a member of this group and who would you like to know? Are these members friends, co-workers or family? What kind of relationship do you have with this group and what kind of relationship would you like to have?

* Answer: Finding a connection is the responsibility of the ally—it takes commitment, trust-building and initiative to develop individual connections within the group you wish to support. Understanding the goals of any movement begins with having a personal stake in its success.

What does it take to become an Ally?

• Being willing to make mistakes—and to keep on trying. Being an ally means that sometimes you don't know what it means to be an ally so you keep asking questions, keep researching on your own—keep educating yourself.

• Being willing to be uncomfortable. You may be the odd one out, but it's important to remain committed to uncovering the role you hold even if it means making a role for yourself.

• Choosing to keep confronting your own privilege. Understanding that the personal is political—meaning that all of our choices either work to support social justice or detract from it. Being conscious takes effort.

Adapted from: Dufferin Diversity Network, “How to be an Ally”