

Pride in Connection



Wearing a Clark Pride t-shirt and standing beneath a rainbow balloon arch, Dean of Student Engagement Cath Busha, *above*, stepped up to the mic. With warmth, honesty, and humor, they reflect on the winding journey of embracing their identity.

Cath was speaking to a room full of teens at the YWCA's Queer Couve Youth Summit, an event designed for LGBTQ+ youth ages 13-18 to connect, build community, and explore their cultural identities together. It was, Cath noted, the kind of supportive space not readily available when they were navigating their own identity in the 1980s and 90s.

Their keynote, titled "Queer History and Resilience," wove together powerful threads: a timeline of queer history, moments from their own life, and the unspoken pressures many queer people have carried across generations. They shared with listeners the stories from their tomboy childhood to being a first-generation college graduate, to fulfilling their childhood dream of becoming a teacher.

But the reality of that dream proved more complicated.

After coming out in the 1990s, Cath discovered that living openly as their authentic self in the workplace was not without consequence. Subtle yet persistent acts of hostility—like a women's clothing catalog appearing anonymously in their school mailbox week after week—served as chilling reminders of just how precarious visibility could be.

Cath ultimately made the decision to step away from K-12 education; they couldn't imagine spending an entire career hiding such a fundamental part of who they are. They pursued graduate school and non-profit work, seeking spaces where authenticity didn't come at the cost of belonging.

Years later, they found their way back to education – this time, in higher ed. Now at Clark, Cath shared, things are different. Today, they're not just allowed to be visible; they're celebrated. They described the joy of working in a place where their identity is welcomed and where they can be open, proud, and fully present.



To close their keynote, Cath invited participants to reflect on a personal question: what do you love about being who you are? Amid the realities of pain and struggle, Cath encouraged them to make space for joy. Their words perfectly embodied the theme of the event: My Joy, My Pride.

At nearby vendor tables, participants could take home a reminder of Cath's story with Clark College Pride stickers and mugs, provided by the Clark College Foundation – a small but colorful reminder of the affirming community cheering them on.

Celebrate Pride in the Community

The Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion will be representing Clark at Vancouver's Pride Block Party, Saturday, June 14, 12-7 p.m. This event is free and open to the public. Learn more on the event's Facebook page.

Photos: Clark College/Malena Goerl