



ORANGE

ORANGE Nominees



VANCOUVER
PRIDE
SOCIETY

Orange - Healing (Sports) This award recognizes an outstanding individual whose work in sports has enriched, or raised the profile of, Vancouver's LGBTQ community.

Jag Bilkhu

Mr. Jag Bilkhu, started running with Calgary Frontrunners in 2000, and then joined the Vancouver Frontrunners Club when he moved here in 2004. He has been on the Board since 2005 and has been the President of the Club for the last three years. Jag's passion has been to provide a safe and friendly environment for the LGBT community and their friends to enjoy running and walking.

As President, he has helped increase the membership to nearly three times its original size. He has supported programs to make the Club accessible for those at all fitness levels including programs for walkers and those beginning to run, and practices to remove barriers to women and transgender members. Vancouver Frontrunners is now Canada's largest LGBT running and walking club and the largest running club in downtown Vancouver. Demonstrating the "You Can Play" principle, the Vancouver Frontrunners came in first out of 56 teams in their category (and in the top 2% of all corporate teams) in the Vancouver Sun Run, an event with nearly 50,000 participants. One of the flagship events of the Club is the annual Pride Run & Walk, a community event to raise money for charity. Since its inception, it has raised over \$40,000 for local charities such as the Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation and Out in Schools. Over the last years, he has focused on growing this event from 52 registrants in 2009 to 250 in 2012. (This year, the target is close to 400).

Key to growing the Club and the Pride Run & Walk has been garnering the support of community partners. Key community organizations he has involved are the Vancouver Pride Society, Gaywhistler.com, Out on Screen, and the Health Initiative for Men. He has also worked hard to build bridges with other LGBT sports clubs notably Queer Active Vancouver (formerly Team Vancouver), English Bay Swimming and Cycling Clubs, the Vancouver Outdoor Club for Women, Out for Kicks and other Frontrunner running clubs notably in Seattle and Portland.

Jag Bilkhu has a Master's degree in Environmental Planning from the University of Calgary and works as a Project Manager for Stantec, one of North America's largest environmental and engineering consulting firms. An avid runner, Jag has run several races including marathons and enjoys getting others to be active with him. He has participated in other LGBT sports clubs since moving to Vancouver such as Out for Kicks, the Vancouver Tennis Association, the Pacific Rim Curling Club and has attended the Gay Games in Sydney in 2002 and the World Outgames in Montreal and Copenhagen in 2006 and 2009.

Meg Walls

My name is Meg Walls and although technically I'm from Calgary, Vancouver is my home. I've lived here for a total of 4 years with a few small breaks in Europe and most recently in Toronto. I was away while my partner and I were trying to get her permanent residency. It was a year of separation from one another and from the city we liked best. Once she was approved and able to move back to Canada we went straight back to Vancouver. Now we were finally able to start our lives without any deadlines looming overhead. We could build off the relationships we had formed since both moving here in 2008 and lay down some roots. The first thing on my list that I wanted to do in order to feel connected to my community was to play basketball. I've been playing since I was really little and have always really enjoyed it. I looked into leagues in Vancouver and was surprised that no league existed for queer women and trans people. There were plenty of co-ed and women's leagues, but no queer league which really surprised me so I figured I might as well start one myself. I reached out to other queer sports leagues like the Double Rainbow Dodgeball League and the Mabel League for advice and guidance. They really helped point me in the right direction and answered my many questions about how they went about starting their leagues and how I should go about starting mine. Then it was just a matter of spreading the word and booking a court. We had our first game in January of this year and wrapped up our first season in May. It was an incredible success because it was so clear how much fun people were having. I believe very strongly that the reason for that was that I created all the teams myself and made them as equal as possible in experience and height. It was never about having the best team or recruiting players, it was about having a purely recreational league where people could play for fun whether they had been playing for years or just picked it up. It was about meeting new people in a community that can be so insular. It was about creating a positive, safe and welcoming space because traditionally sport has not been that way for women, trans, gender-variant and queer folks which is such a shame because it can be such a rewarding activity. This approach helped foster an atmosphere of non-competition and it worked because every game people were coming together as a community and cheering for everyone regardless of what team they were on. Countless people told me it was the most fun they'd ever had playing basketball and it warmed my heart to hear that. To have that feeling of friendship and support in an activity that is intrinsically competitive is why this league is so important.

Since creating Queer Van Hoops I have started a soccer and ultimate league with the same philosophy as QVH. I'm confident these leagues will be just as fun, welcoming and non-competitive focused as QVH. I have had an absolute blast putting them together, participating in them and interacting with players and fans alike. I feel more connected to my community than I thought possible and I am truly touched that someone took the time to nominate me for this special award.

Peter Diniz

The group I organize is called SkiOUT. SkiOUT is just a group of friends enjoying skiing and boarding in Whistler Blackcomb. 13 years ago I started thinking about creating a like-minded group of people to enjoy the outdoors that has blossomed into an amazing group of friends. As a proud gay man living in Whistler for 8 years, and with the success of SkiOUT, I realized there was a fairly large and transient LGBT group in this small town, and many LGBT visitors, but there was nowhere that people could meet, and create community. Everyone knew Peter worked at the Bank, Dave at the restaurant, Russell at the hotel etc, but many gay and lesbians were only here for a season, or 12 months at most, they needed to realize that they were not the only gays in the village. Whistler is very accepting of the LGBT community; however the dynamics do not support a gay bar. When a good friend and gay man, Dave, bought the South Side Diner, I approached him with my idea, a LGBT night, once a month, to create community, friends, partners, and raise money for needed charities, and WHOOSSH was created. I had already been organizing SkiOUT for 5 years; I had the membership, the supporters, the marketing resources of 500+ members, so long story, short, SkiOUT, has organized OUTings on Whistler Blackcomb, Winter and Summer for 13 years now, and produced WHOOSSH for 7 years, raising \$43,500+ for LGBT charities, creating community, and lifetime friendships both within Whistler and around the WHOLE WORLD! Many of our members live in the US, Australia, New Zealand and visit us frequently. To me, SkiOUT and WHOOSSH are just a give back to the many Peters out there that helped me when I was growing up, and the amazing people who do amazing charity work, with those maybe not so fortunate as myself. SkiOUT can be found on www.skiout.com and facebook search word skiout.