

Keeping June 16 real

On the 16 June 1976, tens of thousands of young people protested against Bantu Education. They were inspired by youth leaders that refused to accept a binaried world that did not accept multiplicities of identity. Today, the struggle may have taken a different shape for some, but for many LGBTIA youths, it continues to echo.

Organisations like SASCO, led by Steve Biko, and the SSRC (Soweto Students Representative Council) respectively inspired and organised the June 16 uprising, which saw a huge age range of youth take to the streets, saying enough was enough. Hundreds of people died on June 16. Hundreds that fought to keep education in line with what youth felt gave them fair and equal opportunities. Bricks representing their names are present in a memorial courtyard at the Hector Peterson Museum that every young person should visit at least once.

Many challenges face specific groups of youth today. LGBTIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Asexual youth) are continuously becoming the targets of hate crimes, sometimes even in their places of learning. Complacency in the reporting, arrests and prosecution of those who commit hate crimes can no longer occur. The importance of safe and supportive places of learning is far from being a revolutionary concept, and need not be treated as such.

I have great respect, not only for the youth who shaped our world as it is today, but also for the youth leaders who continue to change it for the better in South Africa. A growing number of youth-led groups of LGBTIA students are putting everything they can into transforming places of learning for the better. They could not do it without the inspiration and guidance of the teachers, parents, activists and allies that shape a good part of the spirit of leadership. The words and voices of those who led youth before them are evident in their continued efforts.

This 16 June, the Kaleidoscope Youth Network thanks not only the generation of '76, but also those who keep their efforts real, through the spirit of their work today. Aluta Continua.

Tish White

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