
Sexual Rights, Human Rights for Everyone

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The coordinator of the Young Network for Health and Sexual Rights at Cenesex speaks with CubaSí regarding the celebration of 9th Cuban Day against Homophobia and the Transphobia.

"Attaining respect and acceptance was a long process that began with total incomprehension, mainly on behalf of my mother", answered Ulises Padrón Suárez to the question if he had suffered some sort of discrimination due to his orientation as homosexual.

Interviewed by CubaSí, regarding the 9th Cuban Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia to begin next week - Ulises admitted to have "grown courage before the problems" and overcome the victimizing tag that so many times people receive, for their sexual orientation or gender identity.

"That was also a learning, because our parents and relatives carry on their backs cultural practices that many times they are unaware of. Distinctive features of a patriarchal culture. For example, It's not easy to hear that your way of loving is wrong or that they overlook your desires, simply for the fact that you have a different sexual orientation from the rest. Those are gaps that we also, somehow, replicate. It is a complex process ".

The young Philology graduate started working recently at the editorial building of the National Center of Sexual Education (Cenesex) - institution that promotes, since 2008, every year in the month of May the celebration of this day - where they also coordinates the Young Network for Health and Sexual Rights, a space oriented not only to people from the LGBTI community (lesbians, gays, bisexual, transsexual and intersexual).

Which is the network's main objective?

"Educate, sensitize in health and sexual rights, mainly as a full and responsible exercise. The network will be five years soon, created in 2011 from a communicative strategy originated through the commonweal campaign **Dos iguales también hacen pareja** (Two equals also make a couple). Allowing, from an investigation process, to know

the needs and lacks existing in the Cuban youth on these topics, and make them visible in the LGBTI community.

"Around five workshops were carried out and the Network was created later. From there we have spread and attained national reach and today we have presence in every Eastern provinces (Guantánamo, Santiago de Cuba, Granma, Holguín, Las Tunas), in Camagüey, Sancti Spíritus, Ciego de Ávila, Villa Clara, Cienfuegos, in Havana, and in the University of Computer Sciences (UCI), where there are young people from all over the country. Besides, there is an interesting project developing at UCI named Love at Second Sight, which promotes topics we work on."

Is the Network solely integrated by people from the LGBTI community?

"The Network doesn't segregate, it doesn't set limits, and neither discriminates against the sexual orientation or gender identity, neither for other racial, cultural or religious matters. Everybody is welcomed. Our projection of life is that we are a great family, those who wish to join us can do it freely, with their conflicts, reconciliations, affections and disaffections, findings and losses. We have built it like that for five years.

"That is, our training workshops try to instruct in health and sexual rights the youths from all sexual orientations and gender identity, granting them certain inputs, but not only as an advice package, but to keep them updated and have them see how these topics are inserted in Cuban society.

"It's vital to know our rules system; to know how one can as a citizen carry out initiatives to trigger a legal change on this regard, how can sexual rights be worked, seeing them as human rights in our context, and how to expose also the topics of gender violence. All of that will allow us to become better people and have a much more systemic vision of the current Cuban reality".

Regarding the 9th Cuban Day against the Homophobia and Transphobia, for the second time dedicated to the claim of work spaces, what can you tell me from your point of view as a Network coordinator?

"This Day is dedicated to this topic for the second time and, therefore, the main focus is **inclusive work spaces for people LGBTI** seeking better conditions (both material as spiritual) while working.

"That is, the goal is to earn respect from people in work spaces, regardless their sexual orientation or gender identity".

"By the way it comes to my mind a story I knew, a transsexual who was prohibited to go to work dressed as a woman. These are facts that tag people, that somehow influence in aspects that later will define the suitability at the work place or school. Evidently, it should not be approached like that, rather focusing on the working capacity.

"These are situations that hunt people. It's not the same with somebody who doesn't have this sort of conflicts, who go through life without problems. Evidently, opportunities are not seen in the same way at workplaces, therefore it's necessary to struggle because the road is filled with such obstacles", said Ulises.