

Maureen Douglas' mission to 2014 Sochi Olympics a success

IOC's non-discrimination clause in host city contract a big victory

By Braden Dupuis



SOCHI MEETING

Pemberton's Maureen Douglas knows firsthand the power of speaking out.

"In college it was all nuclear disarmament," said Douglas, an engagement expert and former Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Committee spokesperson.

"A few voices became many voices over the course of five to 10 years, that became this thundering voice of both sanity and protest ... (it) really did start to shift the nuclear mindset."

It was that early brush with protest that proved to Douglas that change was possible.

"I feel fortunate I've seen it happen," she said.

And she saw it happen again last week, when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) released its recommendations for the Olympic 2020 agenda.

Among the recommendations was that "non-discrimination on sexual orientation" be included in the 6th Fundamental Principle of Olympism.

Douglas played a role in making that recommendation happen.

She and Vancouver councillor Tim Stevenson flew to Sochi last year for a meeting with the IOC during the Games.

"We came out of that meeting feeling very, very positive," she said.

"And now... to be validated from that work is so great, because it was a gamble."

When they left for Sochi, Douglas and Stevenson weren't even certain they would get a meeting with the IOC.

"If the IOC wouldn't meet with us, what we were going to do is just start lobbying like crazy while we were there, to basically get every influencer working to get us this meeting," she said.

"But once we were on the ground I think we had sent one more note saying we've arrived, we're here, and within about 12 hours of that they were like yeah, your meeting is set."

While nothing was promised during the meeting, the language used by the IOC was very encouraging, Douglas said.

Even so, there wasn't much in the way of new developments for months.

"When 10 months go by and nothing is coming out, you do start to wonder, are they going to deliver it?" she said.

But the IOC did deliver, and the new recommendations will be put to a vote in early December.

It's a change that has been a long time coming.

"I think in the culture of a lot of longstanding institutions, change is very difficult. It just takes so much momentum," Douglas said.

And the momentum built up by people voicing their disagreement with IOC policy played a big role in the changes that could be forthcoming.

For Douglas, it's validation for the thousands of voices raising the issue before, during and after the 2014 Sochi Games.

"If you never speak up, if one voice doesn't bother to say anything that doesn't inspire the next person, and the next person, and the next person, you don't have many voices," she said.

"Each of us has to maintain that will and that courage to speak out about something."

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