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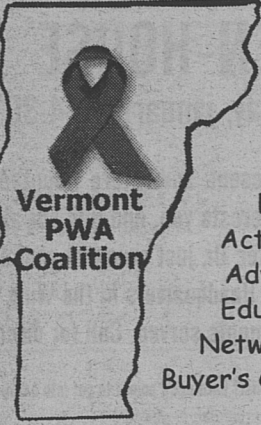
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## Kicked to the Curb by HRC and NGLTF

BY GLENN LECARL

Michael Warner observed recently in the Village Voice Literary Supplement that: "we have become spectators to our own movement." A quick look at the conduct of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) over the past year illustrates just how true this is for homeless lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth.

A shocking pattern of neglect readily emerges. In 2001, our leading community advocacy organizations continued a long-standing trend by pouring their vast resources primarily into other issues and activities — such as domestic partner benefits, marriage rights, workplace equality, adoption rights, hate crimes, ballot initiatives and community organizing — literally at the expense of our homeless youth.

HRC's response to the Sept. 11 tragedy offers a case in point. HRC is correct to fight for the rights of affected LGBT families, and HRC's creation of a special relief fund was admirable. Yet, thousands of LGBT youth call the streets of New York and other American cities "home," and the death toll from this crisis continues to mount. These youths have no slice of \$1 billion-plus to claim. Many don't even have a place to their heads at night. When does HRC fight for their rights, or for their lives?

Considering the fundraising letter I recently received from HRC — no time soon. Reading it, in fact, if you didn't know otherwise, you would never even guess that a large-scale and deadly crisis afflicts the youth in our community. HRC, it begins, "works to end discrimination, secure equal rights, and protect the health and safety of all Americans..." Surely a resolute effort to address homelessness among LGBT youth falls well within this mission.

Not according to the recently announced HRC Equality Fund Grants for 2001, however. Out of \$104,000 awarded, only about \$20,000 (and only in part) went to any LGBT youth-related efforts, and none went toward efforts benefiting homeless youth.

HRC's impending purchase of a \$10 million building for its headquarters in Washington, DC, one that will require \$10-\$12 million more in renovations, presents therefore a particularly grievous irony. Within this context of neglect and while countless thousands of our youth remain homeless, HRC is buying itself an expensive new home.

That, by some estimates, LGBT youth represent at least 20 to 40 percent of homeless youth, places this neglect further into perspective. When you consider the staggering number of youths overall — some sources say 500,000 to 1.5 million — who run away or are forced from their homes each year, the crisis facing LGBT youth becomes self-evident.

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Compounding this tragedy is the often hostile environment LGBT youth face at homeless shelters and runaway shelters. Few geared to their needs exist at all. Consequently, many youths must resort to prostitution to survive, profoundly increasing their risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Each night on the streets also places these kids at further risk of violence, drug and alcohol addiction, and suicide.

Faced with a crisis of this magnitude, NGLTF's record over the past year therefore appears equally dismal. The group's National Policy Roundtable convened last spring "to provide a forum for discussion, strategic thinking, information sharing and development of collaborative projects." Surely, when the leaders of our community gather with such a heady mission, this crisis of homelessness among our youth would be near the top of the agenda—or at least on it. Not so, according to the press release issued at its conclusion.

This trend continued through the year. Absent as well from the agenda of the group's recent Creating Change Conference, billed as "the National Conference for the GLBT Movement," was any mention of homeless LGBT youth. According to the press release: "Creating Change consists of eight day-long pre-conference institutes, four plenary sessions, more than 150 workshops, seminars, caucuses and networking sessions." Doesn't NGLTF consider this deadly crisis worthy of even one workshop, let alone a conference?

Amazingly, out of approximately 70 press releases posted on the group's website this year, only a handful are LGBT youth-related and none are related to this crisis. Wow!

Though snapshots, together these facts and figures do present a startling picture. HRC and NGLTF have inexplicably abandoned homeless LGBT youth to their fate. While their efforts this year in other areas may indirectly benefit LGBT youth, the reverse may also be true. Many more are at risk of becoming homeless because they are being raised within intolerant homes, churches, schools and communities where they remain most vulnerable to the backlash progress brings. And as winter closes in around the nation, the plight of those already homeless becomes only more acute — and more deadly.

Intentionally or not, Michael Warner spoke poignantly to their alienation. Having been kicked to the curb by HRC and NGLTF, our youth on America's streets would have difficulty catching even a glimpse of our "movement!"

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