

Visibility Day Goes Trans

By CHRISTOPHER KAUFMAN

Two national leaders working for transgender civil rights will be traveling to Vermont at the end of January to advise local organizers working to promote a transgender non-discrimination act during this year's legislative session.

R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center, Equality Vermont and the University of Vermont have invited Mara Keisling, director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, and Lisa Mottet, legislative lawyer for the Transgender Civil Rights Project of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force to attend this year's Queer Visibility Day at the State House on January 28. Keisling and Mottet will also spend time meeting with students, faculty

and administrators at UVM and a full day working with grassroots organizers at the ninth Queer Summit, scheduled at the State House on January 29.

Queer Visibility Day organizers have chosen to focus the annual event on transgender rights this year. The last legislative biennium saw a transgender rights bill, introduced by openly gay Representative Bill Lippert, languish in committee. Organizers hope the political make-up of the new House, with a likely robust majority of GLBT-friendly members, represents a strong opportunity for the bill to be passed into law this session. The legislation would explicitly protect transgender people from discrimination in housing, public accommodations, credit, employment and other areas.

Local organizers invited Keisling and Mottet to Vermont in

order to share their experiences working with other states and municipalities that have passed similar legislation. Minnesota, Rhode Island, California and New Mexico currently protect transgender people from discrimination under state law. Many municipalities also include gender identity or expression in their non-discrimination codes. "We're excited about sharing what we've learned in other parts of the country with Vermonters," Mottet said. "We want to be as helpful as we can so that Vermont can continue to lead the way on transgender and other queer issues."

Visibility Day typically offers grassroots LGBTQ organizers the opportunity to set up information tables at the State House and meet with legislators to explain the important issues facing our community. This year, organizers



National Center for Transgender Equality director Mara Keisling will be at the State House for Queer Visibility Day.

hope to set up a "shadowing" program where local activists will be able to spend a significant part of the day with their legislator, eating a meal together, watching committee work in action and touring the State House. Organizers will also be able to join in an educational

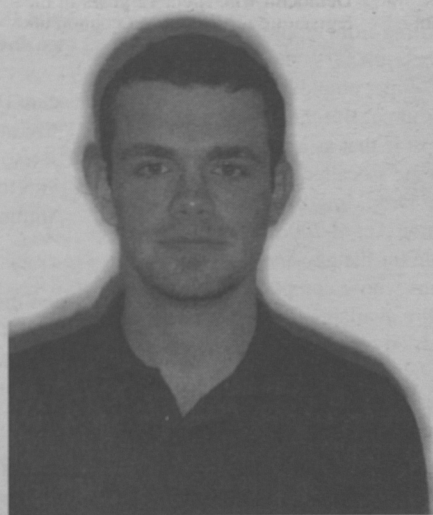
workshop about the Legislative Process jointly hosted by R.U.1.2?, Equality Vermont and the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. The Network is also welcoming their members to the State House that day.

Queer Visibility Day will begin at 8:00am on Friday, January 28, at the State House. To register in advance for the shadowing program, call Equality Vermont at 802-310-6296. The Queer Summit is the following day and will be an organizing strategy session for the transgender non-discrimination act. Transgender people are especially encouraged to attend. ▼

Christopher Kaufman is the executive director of the R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center. For more information on the Summit, contact him at R.U.1.2?, 802-860-7812.

Burlington's Women's Rape Crisis Center has announced that its Wednesday night staff for the hotline for victims of sexual violence will include male advocates. Center Director Celia Cuddy said in an interview that the number of male callers seeking support had quadrupled since 2000.

"What we hear so often is 'I don't know if I'm calling the right place ...'" Cuddy said. The Center has in the past run a support group for male survivors of sexual violence, including childhood sexual abuse and adult sexual assault. "For an agency that wants to be welcoming to all survivors, this is an impor-



"Men have a stake in challenging the dominant paradigm where stereotypical masculinity is equated with violence and aggression to establish power and control."

WRCC outreach worker Jim Leahy

his witnessing of the pain that women friends and female relatives have gone through as sexual assault victims.

Leahy is part of helping to create a Men Advocating Change group at UVM. The group took part in a candlelight vigil sponsored by the Feminist Majority at UVM in early December to draw attention to assaults taking place on the path through the Redstone section of campus.

What's important about having men on the hotline, he said, is that it "provides an opportunity for men to identify as victims, but also for the male partners, friends,

Rape Ctr. Opens Hotline to Men

tant step. We wanted to start small and make sure that everyone calling the hotline has a choice of speaking to a male or female advocate."

Cuddy hastened to add that the staff did not assume that a male caller would rather speak to a male advocate, but that it was important to make the option available. The agency's membership, Cuddy said, voted three years ago to welcome men for outreach and fundraising. Expanding the hotline staff to include male advocates is

the next logical step.

The men who will be staffing the hotline on Wednesdays from 5 to 9 pm have gone through the agency's recent joint volunteer training with SafeSpace. Other agencies may not have experience in dealing sensitively with male victims, Cuddy suggested. "Male survivors of rape rarely go to the hospital, so they may not have considered how a rape kit protocol might need to be adjusted."

The hotline hours with

male staffing started on December 2.

Asked whether the increase in male callers represents an absolute increase in assaults on males, WRCC outreach worker Jim Leahy suggests otherwise. "I think that increase is a response to outreach."

Leahy and Cuddy agree that the vast majority of the perpetrators of sexual assault reported by their agency's clients are men, whether the victims are men or women. "Men have a stake in sup-

porting efforts to challenge the dominant paradigm where stereotypical masculinity is equated with violence and aggression to establish power and control," Leahy said.

Jim Leahy is the first male staff member of the Women's Rape Crisis Center. The 2003 graduate of Colgate University (he majored in mathematical economics) said his passion for working on sexual violence issues is based on two factors: his involvement in a campus group called Men Advocating Change, and

and family members" of sexual assault victims to get support and understanding.

"It's time," WRCC Director Cuddy said, "for us to be having a statewide conversation, and for men to have the opportunity to not hold this [experience of victimization] inside." ▼

WRCC's 24-hour hotline number is 863-1236 or 1-800-489-7273. The service is free and confidential.