

Outright Vermont Fundraising Update

BY LLUVIA MULVANEY-STANAK

With the end of the year nearing and the recent coverage of Outright Vermont's financial challenges over the past months, we thought folks could use a bit of an update.

Over the past couple of months, friends of Outright VT (volunteers, supporters, donors and especially our youth) have responded to requests for support with an incredible amount of love, understanding and dedication. It is warming to know that Outright VT truly is important to so many generations of people in our state.

We are proud to report that our family of donors has not only responded to this year's grant short-comings by pledging donations, but that they have also "recruited" friends, family and co-workers to join our family of donors. We have also received an anonymous challenge donation of \$10,000, to help motivate our board and donors to match this gift by the end of the year. To date, we are more than half of the way there, again in large part to the response from our donor base. Thanks to the recent doubling of our board, we are confident that we will both meet and exceed this goal.

As part of the community response to our requests for support, eight new board members have joined, to bring our numbers up to 13! However, the truly exciting part is that three of these members are YOUTH! Outright VT hasn't enjoyed a board of this size and depth since pre-Civil Unions days and we are excited at the amount of energy, passion and experience that our new members bring to our organization.

In addition to our new board and growing family of donors, we have also started to receive some good news from grant foundations. As reported in last month's Out in the Mountains, queer youth organizations are finding fewer and fewer foundational support sources for direct service work for queer

youth this year. In an effort to curb this recession in our grant support, we have sought funding from more progressive funders like the Astraea Foundation, Funding Exchange and Milagro Foundation. Much to our joy, ALL of these foundations recognized the importance and impact of our work

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with queer youth in Vermont and actually funded us this fall to help sustain our work. This is the first time we have been funded from ANY of these organizations and Outright VT is now the FIRST organization that the Milagro Foundation, an international funder, has ever funded in the state of Vermont.

While all of this news is fantastic, the board and staff at Outright VT realize that this truly is only Phase One of a much larger effort to secure the future for our organization. We all believe that despite our tough times this year, this will truly be Outright VT's finest moment; we are all dedicated to building a solid foundation to keep us steady in uncertain times. This way, we will be able to protect ourselves against the fallout from shifts in funding on a national or state level. We know that the core of Outright VT is the people of Vermont who support us on a regular basis. We are proud of our history as one of the first

queer youth organizations in this country, and that we remain not only the oldest queer direct services organization in Vermont, but the sole queer youth organization in the state. We take pride in the fact that we are the leaders among queer groups in Vermont, as we continue to fight for justice for all by working to end racism, transphobia, heterosexism and homophobia in this state.

Through careful planning, funding strategy and a concentration on seeking & maintaining sustainable support from the community, we do believe that we will not only uphold our current services and structure into 2006, but that we will also continue to grow as an organization.

Simply put, Outright Vermont saves lives, and our donors know this. Losing a youth to suicide this summer is a very real reminder of the need for Outright's services. For 16 years, our organization has focused on advocating for and supporting queer youth, and in doing so we have made the lives of ALL youth safer, healthier and brighter. We are also helping children of queer parents, youth who are perceived to be gay and even, any and all youth who are victims of bullying via homophobic acts. These young people deserve the support and refuge of a place like Outright Vermont, a place that is inclusive of all identities. We need everyone who "never had a place like Outright" to make sure that there is never another Vermont youth who grows up saying this.

We encourage those who are not involved with Outright VT or who have let their involvement lapse, to rejoin our family of Vermonters who are united to continue to support the lives of young queer people in our state. For more information on how you can help, please visit our (soon to be new) website: www.outrightvt.org.

Lluvia Mulvaney-Stanak is a co-director of Outright Vermont.

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* The Vermont AIDS Hotline is open weekdays, 8:30-4:30. (For information 24/7, call the National AIDS Hotline 800-342-2437.)

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