

OUT in the mountains

VERMONT'S VOICE FOR THE LESBIAN, GAY,
BISexual & TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY SINCE 1985

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In Sync

R.U.1.2? and SafeSpace Get Together

BURLINGTON – R.U.1.2?

Queer Community Center and SafeSpace, after months of meetings, have decided to work together as one organization. What isn't clear yet is exactly how that will pan out. Possibilities include sharing office space, staff, volunteers and/or funding. It's still in process, with hopes that definite goals will be reached soon.

"We hope to make an announcement at the (R.U.1.2?) community dinner," R.U.1.2? board Chair Ita Meno said in March.

Meno and her counterpart for SafeSpace, Chair Jackie Weinstock, said they are excited about putting the two organizations together, but that exhaustion is beginning to set in. Members of the transition team have been willing to go to extra meetings for at least the past 4 months, they said, the meetings resulting in the general decision to work together.

The six people on the transition team include Meno, Weinstock, R.U.1.2? Executive Director Christopher Kaufman, SafeSpace Executive Director Kara DeLeonardis, Karen Vastine of the SafeSpace board of directors, and Paula Jackson, an R.U.1.2? board member. As the process continues, one or two community members will be added to the team, they said.

It's not about cutting jobs or services, Weinstock said. It's actually about enhancing services.

One primary goal is to "infuse an anti-violence perspective" into both community organizations, she said. If one person answered the phone for both organizations, for example, the person they're talking to would have an anti-violence perspective, Meno added.

Quite a few queer community centers across the country have combined services with anti-violence programs, Meno said. The two mission statements of both R.U.1.2? and SafeSpace go together nicely, said Weinstock.

Talk of moving local LGBT groups together has been going on for some time. Last year, R.U.1.2?, SafeSpace, Outright (statewide organization for LGBTQ youth), and Mountain Pride Media, which publishes *OITM*, received a Unity Project grant to help them decide whether to merge. A consulting firm was hired which interviewed many staff and volunteers, then issued a report on the results of their conversations. There was general agreement that the organizations wanted to work together, although in what ways differed for many involved and brought forward many concerns. While the groups did not receive a second grant to pursue their objectives, R.U.1.2? and SafeSpace agreed they were still interested in working together, thus all the extra meetings in recent

months.

Meno said the transition is not due to financial difficulties of either organization as both are on solid footing. "We're coming from a really positive space," she said. Possibly some day there will be a larger space for the two organizations to share. But there are not funds for that now. One complaint people had was that they can't financially support so many different organizations.

"Here's an opportunity for the two to possibly become one," Weinstock said.

Meno said having separate organizations is also taxing on people's resources, with people stretching their volunteer hours to cover the needs.

Also, there are money concerns.

"Our organizations are fine, but we didn't budget for this," Weinstock said. If the organizations decided to join legally and one of them move, there would be legal fees and moving costs. A separate account has been set up for donations, Meno said. Eventually, money could be saved by the two becoming one organization. There could be one director instead of two, which would save some money, although that director would likely be paid more to run a much larger organization.

Currently, R.U.1.2? is operating on a \$211,000 annual budget. Halfway through the October-September fiscal year, "believe



THE TRANSITION TEAM: (l. to r.): R.U.1.2? Executive Director Christopher Kaufman, SafeSpace Chair Jackie Weinstock, SafeSpace Executive Director Kara DeLeonardis and R.U.1.2? Chair Ita Meno (absent: Karen Vastine and Paula Jackson).



We are working hard to make this transition accessible and accountable. If you have ideas you wish to have heard, please connect with us. Here's how:

- 1 • Drop by R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center. We're generally open from 10am – 6pm, Monday through Friday.
- 2 • Call Christopher at R.U.1.2? QCC at 860-7812, or Kara at SafeSpace at 863-0003. If you wish to speak with another transition team member, ask them for contact information.
- 3 • E-Mail the entire transition team at TransitionTeam@ru12.org
- 4 • Visit our blog at: QueerCommunityCenterTransitionTeam.blogspot.com
We'll be regularly monitoring and posting agreements and recommendations on the blog.

it or not, we're almost exactly on target," said Kaufman, who has decided to step down as executive director this year. He said R.U.1.2? wrote a "really tight budget" because they knew the Gill Foundation would not be funding any community centers this year. One of R.U.1.2?'s biggest successes is diversifying its funding, Kaufman said. That way, if one source of income doesn't come through, "it's replaceable without killing your agency," he said.

"That's another plus for joining with SafeSpace," Kaufman said. Combining the two would

broaden the base of funders and help make both organizations more stable financially.

SafeSpace currently operates on a budget of about \$130,000, said Executive Director Kara DeLeonardis. She said by combining resources, the two organizations will be able to "reduce competition" for funding. "Hopefully we can do more with less," she added.

Kaufman said the organizations have been having discussions about some sort of joining for at least three years.

"I'm really excited about it," he said. ▼