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Vermonters to California!!

National Association of GSA Networks - National Gathering
July 31-August 3, 2006

BY ANJA PFEFFER

Kate Jerman (Co-Executive Director of Outright Vermont): "Would you like to go to San Francisco?"

Anja Pfeffer (Faculty Advisor of Glow-Up, Mt. Anthony Union High School, Bennington): "Excuse me???"

Kate: "There is the 1st National GSA Network Conference in San Francisco and we need you to go. Also, do you have a student whom you could take a long? They are sponsoring one adult and one youth from each state!"

Now, seriously. Who in their right mind would answer: "Umm, you know, Kate, I do not find San Francisco enticing at all, do not want to meet new people, and who needs GSAs anyway??"

Anja: "You mean you are asking me whether I want to go to San Francisco and meet members and advisors from other GSAs?? OF COURSE!!"

Kate: "Do you have a student to go with you?"

Anja: "Yes! Aaron Webb! He was the one who originally contacted the administration asking for a GSA. He is not only one of our most active Glow-Up members but is also fortunate enough to have a very supportive mother."

Kate: "Great! I will send you all the necessary info."

No, this is not some sort of dream or hallucination. This is exactly how it came about that Aaron and I did, in fact, travel all the way across the country to participate in the 1st National GSA Network Conference. Neither he nor I had ever been to California. Needless to say, we were very excited about this amazing opportunity. Our task at hand was clear and seemed simple enough: we were to bring the Vermont perspective to this gathering where statewide and regional gay-straight alliance networks from around the U.S. were coming together to learn from each other, as well as talk about the future of a National GSA Association.

After a trip that took just about as long as my flight to Germany earlier this summer, we arrived safely in the hotel where we got together with 63 other people attending the conference. One look at the schedule showed us that we would be on our toes from 8 am to 5 pm every day. The workshops were meant to allow time for skills building, peer exchange, and learning about key issues facing GSA networks like fundraising, policy advocacy, leadership programs, and organizational development. As part of the program we were also to focus on exploring youth leadership models for GSA networks and sharing our best practices regarding the youth organizing GSA movement. Anyone who had any energy left after that was free to explore the city.©

The GSA Network did a wonderful job in planning and preparing this conference. All workshops and discussions were engaging and inspiring. We usually left them with a feeling of empowerment, as well as new ideas for our particular situation in Vermont. There



The new Outright digs at 241 North Winooski Avenue in Burlington. PHOTO PROVIDED

were, however, also several times when both Aaron and I could hardly hide our feeling of surprise: the level on which several of the talks were held was quite overwhelming since it was as though networks in other states seemed so well-established, while we are still battling with grassroots work here in Vermont. GSA Network in California, for instance, began working with 40 GSA clubs in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1998 and in 8 years has helped to accelerate the growth of GSAs in California to now more than 545 clubs (representing more than 40 percent of the state's high schools).

Almost all of the people at the conference, in fact, represented state networks or specific state organizations. We therefore did receive a great insight into the collaboration that is already happening between some states and potentially could happen all around the country. It was fascinating to meet people from as many as 18 U.S. states (Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Washington, D.C.; plus Virginia, North Carolina, Indiana, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Florida, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Oregon, Washington, and Missouri), have Canada represented with 2 people from British Columbia, and to even get to know one of the staff members from the Matthew Shepard Foundation.

Hearing people's stories, talking about common struggles, brainstorming strategies to overcome the hurdles that are thrown into our path day in day out,

reaching out

BY WILL HOLDEN

Dear William,
I have been seeing someone now for over four months, and for a while, everything was fine. We got along great, and her family was very supportive to our relationship. The reason I write is because, about a month ago, we had sex for the first time. After that I noticed that she seemed to want to have sex all the time. At first it didn't really bother me, but after a while it was apparent that she only came over to see me because we'd have sex. I don't know what to do. I don't want to end a relationship that was once very meaningful. What should I do about this skewing romance?

— 19/F/Springfield

In response:

I'm sorry that your relationship isn't going the way it was, and that your girlfriend seems to only want you for sex. Before you think about ending this relationship, think about the alternatives. Try inviting her over, and having her sit somewhere to talk (like across from you at a kitchen table). Try talking to her about how you feel. It doesn't sound like the whole relationship was like this, but only the last month. Before then, you sound like you had a wonderful relationship. Again, the easiest way to deal with this problem is simply to talk it out. If the first three months of the relationship meant anything, then this approach should do just fine.

Note about when you talk to her though. Try using the simple "I" messages (though old, they do work). How you feel, when she seems to only want to sleep with you, and you feel that because you need ... It's a handy little tool, and hopefully will help you out. I hope that I was of service, and give another letter to update us when you do talk to her.▼

If anyone else has a question to ask me, e-mail me at wholden7@aol.com, or call me at 1-802-683-6072.

making connections, and building community - those were the gifts that Aaron and I brought back with us to Vermont. We are not only incredibly grateful to Outright for sending us on this trip but also inspired to share this new knowledge and energy. With that in our minds and hearts we are now calling out to you:

Students and teachers out there! If you could see tomorrow, would you change today? WHAT would you change? If you are outraged by the homophobia and transphobia at your school, if you want to create political and cultural change in your community, if you hope to erase harassment and discrimination that silences people's voices everywhere - let us make a difference. It is time that we come together and join hands. We have a lot of work to do!!▼

➔ Anja Pfeffer can be reached at apfeffer@svsu.org. Outright Vermont can be reached at 865-9677, or at outrightvt.org.