

Profile

OUTRIGHT Coordinator Focuses on Youth

OUTRIGHT Vermont is a support group for lesbian and gay youth. OITM asked Josie Juhasz, the group's Director, what "older" lesbian and gay community members can do to help support the work and people of OUTRIGHT. Josie answered as follows:

"Kids today are in great need of role models. The thought used to be that if you were an out lesbian or gay man and in support of young people, that meant you were 'recruiting' them. That is the farthest from the truth. This is now who and what we are about:

"Supporting these kids means breaking their isolation. Seeing an older

lesbian or gay man suddenly means they are not alone. It means they are not invisible, that people are out there living real lives. Growing up 'queer' no longer seems as filled with only negative stereotypes. Just a little support can mean so much. They see that it is possible for them to have role models and mentors that are also lesbian and gay.

"Just think of the things that would have made a difference in your life when you were an adolescent. The breaking down of isolation barriers is so important - letting kids know that there is a community that they are a part of - a community with a history and a culture.

"Our community is on the edge of breaking new ground, and these kids are already talking about it and realizing it. As difficult as it may be, we need to find ways to accept and integrate these youths into our larger community. These young people are already well aware that being gay or lesbian is so much more than having sex with a same-sex partner. They are already beginning to understand the politics and the need for social change.

"It seems like we don't get some of the support we would like from the older folks - 25 and up - because they are having some of their own internal struggles about their own adolescent experiences and their feelings of recruitment. We need to deal with ourselves before we will be at a place where we can truly support the youth that needs us. We need to address and resolve our own issues, internally, so that we will be com-

fortable enough to deal with their issues.

"Sometimes one of the young people's stories still hits home a bit close for me. Not all of our pains are going to go away.

"So - besides changing some of our ideas and ways of thinking, we do have specific jobs that someone can be doing to help us. We need volunteers to staff the Information Support Line. We need plan-

ners and organizers of alcohol-free/chem-free functions that are safe for the young folks to attend. We need people who will fund-raise. We are setting up support groups throughout the state and we need facilitators for those groups. The

OUTRIGHT library needs donations of books, films, and movies. We need to find better ways to distribute information. I also could use someone who is computer-friendly to help out in the office."

Anyone wishing to find out more information about OUTRIGHT or wanting to volunteer should contact Josie at the OUTRIGHT office in Burlington at (802) 865-9677.

Following are excerpts from the letters of two OUTRIGHT members that Josie has agreed to share with us. They show better than anything else the powerful influence a group like OUTRIGHT can have on gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth:

"I have to tell you how important my introduction to OUTRIGHT is...I needed a change. I felt myself slipping into my old vicious cycle of isolation, self-hatred, and suicidal tendencies again when I saw your ad in the paper...From

"All of a sudden I had people to talk to who don't know me enough to jump to the wrong conclusion...all of a sudden I was glad to be gay! I love being gay!"

- OUTRIGHT member

the moment I walked into your office, a half hour early, to the time I was dropped off at my house, were the first eight hours of my life, as far as I can remember, that were not perverted my defense mechanisms. All of a sudden I had people to talk to who don't know me enough to jump to the wrong conclusions...all of a sudden I was glad to be gay! I love being gay! Forgive me for sounding enthusiastic, but it is something new to me...being gay is not just about sex. It's about every relationship I have with everyone I know. It reaches into every corner of my life and until now, that life has been tainted by phoniness and empty stagnation."

"I am afraid to ask anyone any questions because people would probably laugh at me and then later wouldn't ever talk to me again. I'm not afraid at being a lesbian at all; it's just the things I don't know and the label that I carry in the back of my mind...lesbian."

Members of OUTRIGHT Vermont will be presenting a panel discussion on gay youth issues at the Coming Out Day celebration in Montpelier on October 13.

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