

# Adults and Youth; Working Together to Build Community

Karin Eade

July and August are the typically slow months for Outright Vermont. These couple of months come after the crush of spring thaw, where we find schools and colleges ending their semesters and trying to fit in all their special programming. The end of the academic year is also tough on students and school staff as they deal with the stress of endings and beginnings. Everyone seems to be at need during this time, and Outright usually hits a financial crisis right smack in the middle of all the chaos.

This year was particularly challenging, we faced the Winooski School Board, the Milton Administration, more young people then every before demanding services, and talk of laying off staff. Once again we made it through, more committed then ever to the mission of fostering sensitivity and understanding of the issues facing lesbian, gay and bisexual youth and those questioning their sexuality.

It is summer when we have a chance to become more reflective and less reactionary, and this summer I find myself in need of understanding the issues facing the lesbian, gay and bisexual adult population as it deals with the l,g,b youth movement in this state. I am asked constantly why I think l,g,b adults don't get more involved with l,g,b youth and I always respond blindly labeling it as internalized homophobia. We've all heard the stereotypes, and we all face the risk of being labeled as pedofiles and recruiters as Outright was (maybe not so bluntly) in Winooski this May. Many of us personally know the harm pedophilia wields on it's victims and none of us want to run the risk of being wrongly accused. Well, this was my response. I had the answer, and as I conveniently filed this information into my knowledge, I forgot to remember the overwhelming feelings I ex-

perienced that day I first entered a high school to present a homophobia training.

The smells, and sounds were so astoundingly accurate to the history of my school years that I was propelled through the past 10 years as if I had never left the institution of my hell. By the time high school came around, many of us already knew something was different about us. I know I did. And high school is a cruel place for people who are different, in an atmosphere of "stability through similarity" those of us who were different threatened all that was holding the masses together. I didn't want that responsibility and shut myself off to the feelings of adolescence. I tried to fit into the norm or at least the acceptable fringe. Today I hear young people telling me about striving to accomplish the very same maneuvers of my past, and I hope for change.

Maybe it is not just internalized homophobia keeping l,g,b adults from taking part in the lives of l,g,b kids. Maybe the haunted memories of our youth, that first time realizing we might be different from the others, holds a powerful block between us and the youth of today.

I know I have had to reconstruct my high school memories to include the visions that have been lock away. To remember how such a "popular" young women felt such isolation and to realize the energy wasted on survival. I can't help but feel disappointed and cheated by the lesbian, gay, bisexual and positive straight adults who were in my life at that time of need. As an adult, I know the feeling of sadness and frustration of looking at a young person in pain and struggling, yet not being able to offer the support that young person needs. As an youth agency director, I work to link

to two, and help create an environment in which all people can understand their full connection to each other.

Maybe that's why I choose to work at Outright Vermont. I know I want to help build a community that includes youth/adult partnerships, and I know Outright Vermont is a vehicle to realizing that community. I also know that there are many people who are needed to run this ship in one way or another and the offering of rewards is quite real. Please think about taking part in building a community that includes lesbian, gay, bisexual youth and those questioning their sexuality. You could be doing more than helping the young people of today, you could be sending a clear and supportive message to the young people of the past. ▼

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