

Group Profile

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

by Deb Lashman

Our kids are just fine the way they are.

The motto of P-FLAG, spotted on a banner at a Pride march, neatly sums up what this organization is about. P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), is a national federation, with chapters across the U.S. Its primary objective is to help families and their lesbian and gay members to understand and love one another and to provide support where needed.

The national office is located in Washington D.C. and provides resources and lobbying efforts to support local chapters. Two to three inquiries are received each week asking about starting new chapters, and the current mailing list includes over 13,000 households. In addition to assisting the formation of new chapters, the national office provides resources in the form of publications, works on media campaigns, and joins with other gay and lesbian organizations in lobbying Congress. The *P-FLAG Poll*, published quarterly, is the official newsletter of the national organization.

The national office is currently working on a major project called "Respect All Youth." A set of promotional materials has been created, and further funding is being sought to cover production costs as well as to sustain a training program for youth-oriented organizations. Efforts are underway to enlist the support of several such organizations so that local P-FLAG chapters can work with in their areas on training about such topics as issues facing gay and lesbian youth and the images presented in society of lesbian and gays.

Vermont has three P-FLAG chapters: one in Rutland, one in Manchester, and the newest one in Burlington.

The Rutland chapter is headed by Peter and Julie Cooper and has been active in a number of areas. The group has worked with the Coalition of Lesbians and Gay Men on lobbying for the passage of the Vermont Civil Rights bill, and it is currently working on a brochure for distribution at Pride Day.

The group meets regularly to provide support and assistance to families and their gay and lesbian members. In addition, because of their listing in the Gay Yellow Pages, they have served as a resource for gays and lesbians new to the area looking to meet others.

Perhaps their most dramatic instance of support came when a young man called them just after he was thrown out of his parents' house. Through a series of calls, the Coopers were able to connect him with services and support through Addison County Counseling Service and find him a place to live. "A listening ear" is how Peter Cooper describes what they do.

Perhaps the biggest concern of the Rutland Chapter is getting people to attend

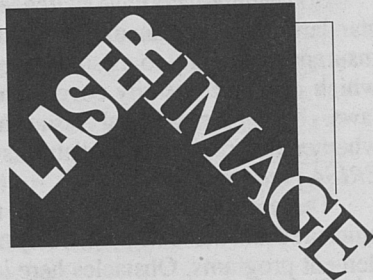
meetings. Parents have been very reluctant to come out - a problem that is not uncommon in rural areas and smaller communities. The Coopers can be reached by calling 773-7601 or by writing 11 North St., Rutland, Vermont 05701.

In Manchester, the P-FLAG Chapter is headed by Mae Morrow. Meetings are held the first Sunday of each month at 2:00 p.m. at the Manchester Congregational Church (across from Equinox House). Mae can be reached by calling 362-4400 or writing PO Box 92, Manchester, Vermont 05254.

The newest P-FLAG chapter in Vermont is the Lake Champlain Chapter, which meets the second Sunday of each month at 2:00 at OUTRIGHT VERMONT, 30 Elmwood Ave, Burlington.

Organized last October and newly registered with the national organization, the Lake Champlain Chapter currently has fifteen members from as far away as the Crown Point area of New York (thus the name Lake Champlain). In addition to regular meetings, they have met with the Guidance Department of South Burlington High and plan to meet with other guidance departments and teachers. They are working on a brochure and will be marching in the Gay Pride Parade with the Rutland and Manchester chapters. Call Renee at 658-3961, Lil at 863-4285, or Robert or Peggy at 518-597-3555 for more information.

In addition to meetings and support services, P-FLAG chapters have a number of publications available. Contact the chapter in your area for more information. For information not available through your local chapter, or to find out how to start a new chapter, you can contact the National Office at (202) 638-4200 or write to PO Box 27605, Washington, D.C. 20038.



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