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From Isolation to Justice:

A letter to the LGBT movement from the Next Generation

This letter has been signed by over 1000 LGBT youth all over the United States. Outright Vermont, the statewide organization working in support of all LGBTQA youth in Vermont, is proud to support all of the young people who signed onto this important statement. To add your name to the list of signatories, send an email with your name, age, town and state of residence to: lgbtnextgeneration@hotmail.com. The support of people over 30 is also requested. To sign on as an ally, send an email including your age, to the above address. For those without email, contact Outright Vermont at 865-9677 to be added to the list. As OITM went to press, there were more than 1000 youth signatures collected.

Among our nation's monuments for liberty, equality and justice lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people march on Washington. For many in the next generation, this is our first opportunity to experience a national march. Yet, we are faced with conflicting emotions. More important than the experience, this march provides us with an opportunity to ask what kind of a movement we are inheriting.

The LGBT movement does not belong to today's leaders alone; it belongs to tomorrow's as well. The next generation of LGBT activists will be left to either sustain or undo the work done today - work that affects how LGBT people are thought of in American society and how we think of ourselves. Thus, we must be guided by a vision that continues to advance our values and enrich our legacy.

To what degree do today's LGBT organizations have a long-term view that anticipates the consequences of today's strategies? What are our movement's values, beyond the festivals, rainbow "tchotchkes," fundraising dinners and concerts?

We, the next generation of LGBT activists, join hundreds of thousands of LGBT people who share a commitment to the values and principles of social justice that are the foundation of the LGBT movement. These values have implications beyond sexual orientation and are the basis of civil rights for all people and inform how social movements act.

WHAT ARE OUR VALUES?

Each one of us grew up in a homophobic society that taught us to feel alone and isolated. From this isolation,

we reach out to each other to build community and act together to build a movement. We are our friends' found families, the creators of new traditions and ethics. We are reinventing gender. We act up, and kiss in. We build community centers

and other social service programs everywhere. When the nation was in homophobic denial, together we launched an unprecedented response to the AIDS epidemic and we created the most poetic monument in the country, the Quilt.

From these experiences, the core values of our movement emerge: compassion, belief and commitment to the common good, non-discrimination, political freedom, freedom from violence and harassment, control over our own bodies, and equal opportunity.

These values are part of a larger legacy that links justice movements together. Do we believe in these values as a "Simple Matter of Justice" for all people? If we truly do, the LGBT movement must resist isolation and return wholeheartedly to this nation's struggle for justice.

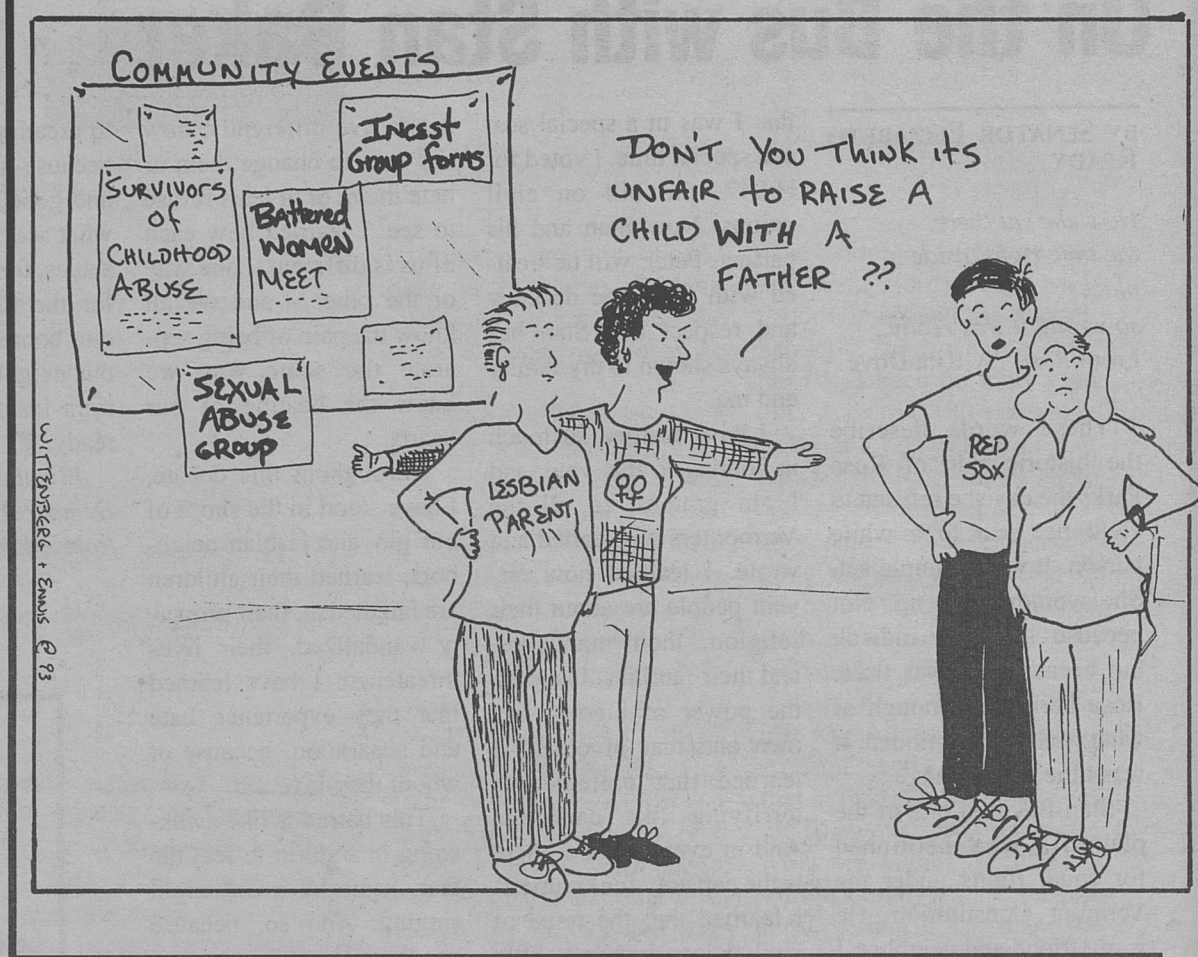
IN ISOLATION

It is clear that the LGBT movement is succeeding at achieving some gains on sexual orientation and gender identity issues. But if LGBT organizations act in isolation, our values will be undermined and they will not be realized.

A single-minded approach that attempts to isolate sexual orientation equality from other struggles limits the movement's agenda so that some may move forward while others are left behind. In our own history, internal battles were fought to recognize some of the movement's most obvious constituents - bisexual and transgendered people. Acting as if sexual orientation is the common denominator - and not justice - makes the movement

irrelevant to those who cannot or will not act in isolation.

LGBT people are the childless elderly, yet lack of social nets for the old is deemed "not a gay issue." The



nation's commitment to public education - on which LGBT youth and parents depend - is deemed not a gay issue. LGBT youth disproportionately represent homeless youth in this country, yet homelessness is not a gay issue. Employment discrimination, for those of us who cannot or will not pass, casts us into poverty, yet unemployment, welfare and Medicaid policies are not gay issues. LGBT people are more likely to abuse drugs and this nation's drug policies are increasingly more criminal than interventionist, yet the war on drugs is not a gay issue. In this framework, we wonder who is "gay?"

If the LGBT movement acts in isolation it is blind to the ways in which it reinforces inequality. What does it mean to fight for more severe hate crimes penalties when we know that in our current criminal justice system people of color and people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds make up a vastly disproportionate number of people arrested and incarcerated? In addition, people 25 and younger are often the perpetrators. Wouldn't prevention of hate crimes - and our core values - be better served if resources and energy spent passing these laws were redirected to join education strategies that reach the places where young people learn?

If the LGBT movement acts in isolation it becomes blind to the crisis eroding the very foundations of civil rights in this country. Increasingly there are no rights apart from those that are bought and secured in the marketplace. The wielding of private power and political access based on wealth undermines democracy for all people. If this remains the context, gains made around "sexual orientation" are meaningless.

OUT OF ISOLATION

We believe the LGBT movement

will not move forward without understanding the reality of LGBT people's lives - which are not isolated or reducible to a single issue. If the LGBT movement continues its trend toward isolation, we will have failed to understand the nature of justice - that it serves the common good and leaves nobody behind.

Thus, the degree to which the LGBT movement is directed by collective input and an open process of decision making is the crucial measure of its commitment to social justice. The survival of the LGBT movement demands that we refuse to concentrate power in any organization, and instead seek to foster a democratic ethic of participation among LGBT people. When this happens, more organizations will support ways for us to participate in the movement beyond appearing at a national march or by writing a check. No organization, no matter what their financial resources, could alone determine the direction of the movement.

TRUE JUSTICE IS JUSTICE FOR ALL

The means our leaders employ to fight for justice inform and redefine the ends we seek. These means define not only the movement's ethics but also determine who is invested in the movement, who it speaks to, who leaves, and ultimately who is left behind.

LGBT people have much to teach American society. It is our turn to support this nation's social justice legacy by contributing to the model through which rights are obtained by a community. If in adding to this model, we are true to our values in means and ends, we will have worked towards the day when this country affords equality to all of its citizens.

We applaud those organizations and activists who have built and sup-