

## Gay youth groups promote positive attitude

by Brent L. Pack  
Q-Notes Staff

In the junior and senior high school's latest movement to celebrate and accept the diversity of its youth, the existence of one minority has been totally ignored. In like manner, as the gay rights movement has sped forward like a steam locomotive toward its destination of liberation, one segment of the community has had to wait in the depot for its own train to pull into the station. However, that group, the young members of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community, have fired their own engines to produce the steam and energy necessary to make their own mark. In the formation of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth groups, these individuals have laid the groundwork to not only cover a large amount of distance in the short run, but also to pace themselves so as to meet their long-term goals of acceptance within both the heterosexual and homosexual populations.

These gay, lesbian and bisexual youth groups, though relatively new in organization, have grown rapidly across North Carolina and the United States. Darryl Williams, one of the founders of the first gay youth group in North Carolina, OutRight!, explains the rapid growth of these groups. "Everyone realized the need for the youth groups, but no one wanted to be the first to attempt one. Once the waters were tested by the first gay youth group, the formation of other groups rapidly followed."

The primary hesitancy in the development of youth groups centers on the legal ramifications since the majority of the participants are considered minors under the law. Although age requirements differ from group to group, the primary age of participants ranges from 13 through 23. In order to protect the facilitators and the board of directors from legal complications, stringent guidelines and practices have been developed. Guidelines include the use of two trained facilitators at each meeting, one male and one female, with no facilitator spending time with any participant on a one-on-one basis in any type of social setting. In addition, no transportation is provided for participants, either to or from meetings, while strict contracts outlining the conduct of each volunteer are signed by the volunteers and the organization.

Although the age requirements and rules for each group vary, the objective seems to be identical. As Tonda Taylor of Charlotte's

youth group Time Out describes, "The youth groups exist to offer support for those who experience a tremendous sense of isolation and low self esteem because they have self-identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual." Of course, providing support for these gay, lesbian and bisexual self-identified youths takes many forms.

The primary purpose is to provide a positive and affirming support group to help the youth "face a hostile environment, characterized by social and emotional isolation, verbal and physical abuse, and rejection from families, peers and churches." To help them understand more about the gay, lesbian and bisexual lifestyle, the groups engage in discussions concerning topics such as "coming out," dating, family problems or rejection by friends and peers. Williams explains, "In a support group meeting, we do not try to decide for the individual what their sexual orientation is; rather, we simply present the reality of a gay, lesbian or bisexual lifestyle. The individual then decides what his or her orientation is."

Because heterosexual society attempts to portray the homosexual population as "perverts who are destroying America," gay youth groups attempt to present role models for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth that provide a more positive and a more accurate portrayal of the homosexual lifestyle. Time Out has hosted Career Days that spotlight such positive role models as doctors, lawyers, senior vice presidents, and bankers who openly admit their homosexuality or bisexuality. The examples provided by these professionals demonstrates that there are homosexuals and bisexuals who are productively working to disprove the stereotypes promoted by mainstream society.

A second purpose of the groups is to provide educational and referral services for young gays, lesbians and bisexuals. These services take the form of books, pamphlets and literature which discusses such topics as "coming out" and living as a homosexual within society. This resource library is available to not only the group participants, but also to members of the community interested in learning more about the gay, lesbian and bisexual communities.

The third purpose of the groups is to expand the knowledge of society concerning gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. Through literature, seminars and panel discussions,

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