

Hunt says she sees herself as a supporter, not a leader, within the movement for LGBT equality.

"For me the primary role of an ally in any struggle is to work with their own group because your group is the one oppressing other people," she says. "I see my role as an ally predominately actually with the straight community — to say 'Come on people, we need to get our act together and stop doing this' — because whether I want to be or not, I'm a part of a group of people oppressing another group of people."

Mirrored by her comments at last year's march and rally, Hunt says a straight ally role should be in "responding and not trying to lead someone else's struggle."

She says: "When the LGBT community says we would like you to be a part of this is when you come. You don't try to come into other people's struggles and lead them. It's so important that straight people understand that it's never their role — anymore than it's the role of a white person to lead a black organization or black struggle or a man to lead a women's organization or women's struggle — I think us straight folks have to recognize that it's not our role to lead, to determine what should be done, to define the strategy, the tactics."

And, despite her near constant support, Hunt also believes there are times when straight allies can say "no," and she's counted only one time she's done so herself — when CRANE presented a Valentine's Day card to anti-LGBT Commissioner Bill James.

"There was no way I could sign something that says 'We love you Bill James,' so I had to say I can't do it," Hunt says. "That's the only time I've said no because most of the time I'm happy to support. So, I do think as an ally you have the right sometimes to say, 'I can't go down that road,' but at the same time predominately we want to be responsive to what the oppressed group wants and needs from us, and really to keep our folks in check."

She adds that it's also important that straight allies never expect gratitude. "That's another thing I try to convince people who are allies. You can't expect people to be grateful when you take your foot off their neck."

Recognizing privilege, Hunt concludes, is among the most important roles of an ally.

"Oftentimes it is very hard for people in the oppressive group to recognize how much privilege they have and for straight people, just like white people, it's so taken for granted how privileged you are. I think perhaps for straight people it should be easier to let it go but when you look at the reluctance for people to accept that gay people should have the same rights as straight people to marry if they want to get married or to have inheritance rights, to walk publicly in who they are and know that that's a safe thing to do is such a huge privilege that a lot of straight people do not understand what they have.

"And, so I think when you have that kind of privilege it's your responsibility to want to extend that privilege to other people and for it to become a right for everyone as opposed to a privilege for your group, to recognize that what you have as a privilege is really a human right and it is a responsibility to make sure that other people have that basic human right also. It's not just about being accepted into the military. It's about the right to be accepted as the human being that you are and everything that comes with that."

[Ed. Note — Slated to appear online with our May 15 print edition content, this article's publication was delayed due to several technical difficulties. It was published online May 19 and reprinted in this issue as well. We regret any inconveniences.]

About CCSJ

First established as an affiliate of the National Center for Community and Justice, the Charlotte Coalition for Social Justice (CCSJ) was founded in 2006. The group and its small, but dedicated staff works with youth in public and private schools across the Charlotte region hosting seminars, workshops, camps and conferences throughout the year. The group focuses on social justice, inclusion, equality and community engagement education.

Nyala Hunt, executive director, says CCSJ is committed to creating a local community that is both inclusive and equitable for all its citizens.

For more information, visit charlottecoalition.org . :

Soulforce concludes ride

LYNCHBURG, Va. — Soulforce concluded its fourth annual Equality Ride on April 23. Twenty-five members of Soulforce Q, the organization's young adult program, visited 15 university campuses on a 50-day tour to advance changes in policies and practices that discriminate against LGBTQ students and faculty.

"I'm incredibly proud of the work everyone did this year," said Caitlin MacIntyre, director for the 2010 Soulforce Q Equality Ride. "The progress we were able to make through dialogue and non-violent action will help improve the treatment of a number of LGBTQ students around the country, and together constitute an important step forward in improving treatment of LGBTQ students everywhere. For a number of these schools, being able to discuss LGBTQ issues with school administrators is a victory in and of itself, and places us on the path for working toward and winning more tangible, substantive victories."

"Soulforce grew out of respect and admiration for the courage and convictions of spiri-

tual leaders who challenged institutionalized discrimination in all of its forms — Jesus, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi," said Executive Director Rev. Dr. Cindi Love.

"As our Riders approach leaders of colleges and universities, they encounter resistance and even arrest, just as Jesus, Dr. King and Gandhi did," Love noted. "Thankfully, these challenges are worth the price paid by these courageous young adults. They have created safe spiritual space in which students and faculty can address their fears and talk openly about intimidation and harassment due to religious bigotry."

A successful encounter was had at Campbell University in Buies Creek, N.C. Soulforce met with students looking to establish a QSA at the school, though it is unclear whether the school's administration will approve of such an organization.

For more information, visit www.soulforce.org.

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Again — thank you — and come out and party with us and DJ Keoki at Closet on July 9.