

Youth talk about problems

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him to receive counseling or even medical care, he would refuse.

"It's unfair," he says. "Someone who has not even made an initiative to try to find out about homosexuality and cut off funding for it, is ridiculous. He's (Commissioner Hoyle Martin, who authored the proposal) not taking the time to find out what we go through as gay or homosexual people."

"It's good if your parents and your loved ones do know. But not all the times are our situations and families right for them to know. People get kicked out their houses. It's tough they know you as one way and that is not who you are."

Michael says if he was forced to publicly acknowledge his sexual orientation, he would do it.

"I guess I'd make do," he says. "I've made do most of my life."

Michael's not sure what would happen if he told his mother. He doesn't think he would have to leave, but it would strain the relationship.

"My mother and I are close," he says. "But knowing would change our relationship."

He feels the group is positive and has helped him come to terms with his confusion. He is adamant about not being recruited to the group or homosexuality.

"You can't recruit somebody for such a thing that causes you so much ridicule from other people," he says. "That's just ignorant speaking from a person that just doesn't know."

Maybe next year

Chuck, 21, is the quietest of the group. He appears to be uncomfortable talking about himself.

He asks that his name not be used as well.

"Oh no," he says with a wave of his hand. "Everybody else knows my name. My parents don't know yet."

He's been a member of TOY for almost two years. But he hasn't told anyone yet.

"I just want to have all the fact," he said. "And just trying to take in the reactions of different people."

He says he feels everyone "knows" he is gay, but telling them is another story.

"With your parents you have to be just one way and one way only," he says. "They would flip."

Chuck says he's known he was gay since sixth grade.

"Maybe I'll come out next year," he says.

Brother on the street

Dressed in a Tommy Hilfiger shirt and baggy jeans, John looks like any "brother on the street," he says.

He was brought to the group by a straight black man who knows he's gay.

Co-owner of a small cleaning business, he asks that his name not be used.

Although his parents and sibling know, he doesn't want anyone else to.

"I know a lot of people," he says. "Using my last name, if I walked in on a client with my partner they would automatically stereotype me. They'd put my name and face together. I don't want to be stereotyped. I don't want them to look at me and say 'get out of here.' It's basically for business purposes. I don't care about anybody else. They ain't putting no food in my face or paying for my car. "You know how some people are."

I am just me

At 24, Eric Cureton is very secure. Handsome, outgoing and well-spoken, the Concord native speaks eloquently and openly on his homosexuality.

He is not afraid of being gay, he says. Nor is he afraid of being black.

"It was different, than coming out in the big city" he says of announcing his orientation. "I had a lot of support in both the black community and the white community. That kind of surprised me."

Cureton says he hates when people try to categorize him.



PHOTO: PAUL WILLIAMS III

Eric Cureton makes points during Monday TOY meeting. Cureton says he will continue to fight discrimination.

"I think that has a direct effect on the gay black community," he says. "You can't feel part of the whole because you're black. You can't feel part of the whole because you're gay. In a sense you're totally separate from everyone else and you tend to keep yourself that way."

"I can't let what other people view me as keep me from where I want to go."

He says the importance of groups like TOY is immeasurable.

"The support, the camaraderie, the information they give out," he says. "When you come here every question you have can be answered. They don't pressure you to do anything or say anything."

How you are is how you are." Cureton laughs when asked if the group recruited him.

"A lot of youth come just to hear," he says. "Maybe the topic for the night is what they're thinking or feeling."

Cureton says the commissioners' decision makes him feel even more committed to fighting for gay rights.

"I'm determined to prove myself and prove them wrong," he said. "If you view me as this, I'll show you what I truly am and it's totally opposite. I'm not a rapist or anything negative...I'm not saying we're here were queer."

You don't have to like me. Just realize that I am human."

Please send articles for Around Charlotte by Monday at 5 p.m.

Pictures will only be returned if accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope.

Around Charlotte

Friday

•Johnson C. Smith University will present the Last Poets at 8 p.m. in Biddle Auditorium. The concert will feature original members Umar Bin Kassan and Abiodun Oyswole.

Monday

•The ABLE Center learning education program is looking for volunteers. An orientation session will held at 6 p.m. at City View ABLE Center. Training sessions will be held Wednesday and April 23 at 6 p.m. at Christ Church, 1412 Providence Road.

Tuesday

•The Caregiver Support Group, affiliated with the Alzheimer's Association, will meet at 7 p.m. at Adult Care

and Share, 6709 Idlewild Road. The facilitator will be Terri Aylor.

•The Parkinson Association will meet at 7:30 p.m. at Community Health Services, 1401 East 7th St. The guest speaker will be Tina Lentz of Pace Challenge.

•The Carolinas Association of Black Women Entrepreneurs will meet at 6 p.m. at Renaissance Place, 631 N. Tryon St. Anthony Hunt of Anthony V. Hunt and Associate Architects and Stoney Sellars will discuss building "An Organizational Coalition for the African American Community." Several CABWE members will be featured, including C. Maria Macon, who will sign copies of her book, "Obsidian II."

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