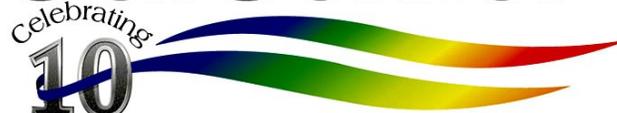




OutCenter

Celebrating
10
Years Proud



Serving the LGBT Community in Southwest Michigan

OUT & abOUT

Newsletter

April 2014

In This Issue

Donate today!

Updates & Events

Feelin' the LOVE 2.0!

Promise of Prom

The Lion in Oz

Oranges or Math?

Donate

Your donation will help the OutCenter serve the LGBT community and its allies in Southwest Michigan.

All amounts count!

The OutCenter is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

Marriage Equality:
A suddenly brief celebration! We're not done yet!



Feelin' the LOVE 2.0!

Self Acceptance

By Tracy Cooper

I have spent many years struggling with Self-Acceptance. Who am I?

Who do others want me to be? Who do I want to become? These questions burdened me for many years. I was struggling with my relationship with my parents, my friends, but most of all myself. I came from a very religious Christian Family so my family accepting by as Gay was not part of their plan-they were unable to accept me and that left me alone and without support.

I began hanging around with people I thought were accepting of me only to later realize they were using me. Others did accept me, but participated in dangerous thrill-seeking behavior that resulted in trouble I did not expect. My "trial and error" ended in feeling more alone and confused. It was then that I found the Out Center. I began attending weekly meetings at the Out Center, but I also began accepting myself and really appreciating my gifts, my talents, and my abilities. I realized I am so much more than my sexual orientation. I am a talented teacher, actress, a mother, an advocate, a coach, an athlete. It was in my appreciation for an entire self that I began accepting who I am.



The road to Self-Acceptance has become beautiful and has opened up many doors for me. I enjoy working at the Out Center and trying to learn everything I can to become a better consultant. Once a month I have the privilege of picking up a van full of teenagers for our Teen Pride meeting. We play games, make social connections, but most of all our Teen Pride Team meetings make sure everyone feels accepted.

When I finally accepted myself I found true friends that support me and love me for who I am and employment with a true purpose; helping others realize that it is okay to be who they are! That is what being at the Out Center can allow us to be: beYOUtiful.

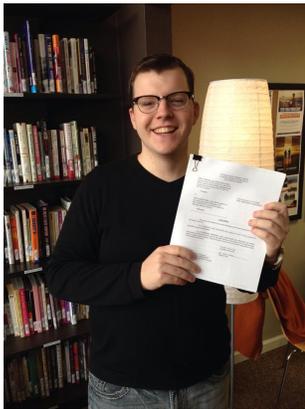
Promise of Prom

By Claire Postelli and MacKenzie Carlock

When people think of proms they think of 80's movies, poofy dresses, and awkward photoops.

In reality, prom is not just big hair and eyeliner it is a coming together of people to celebrate life and youth. However, not everyone feels safe enough to go and join in the festivities.





Top photo of community members and allies at the OutCenter celebrating the Michigan court's decision in support of same-sex marriage; bottom photo of OutCenter Board Chair, Brian Savage, with a copy of the ruling.

Proms are a scary concept for a lot of queer people. LGBTQ youth do not always have the opportunity to bring their significant other, wear what they want, or even feel comfortable enough to go to any form of dance in their entire high school career. This fear is very valid. In fact, last year a group of students and parents at Sullivan High School in Sullivan Indiana attempted to ban gay classmates from attending their prom by pushing for "traditional" prom rules and themes. In order to appease outraged people, they offered to have a "separate but equal" prom. What does this mean exactly? All they said to explain themselves was that this worked because gays have "no purpose" in life.

With this kind of hatred and oppression circulating, it is no wonder a lot of teens do not feel like they are wanted at proms all around the country. All of this behavior teaches people that they should hide who they are or else they won't be able to participate in "normal" activities. This is not true.

The OutCenter and our TeenPride GSA has decided there should be a place where all teens no matter their gender or sexuality can experience prom. Prom is one of the fun privileges that most teenagers experience in their high school career so why not make it accessible to everyone?

The plans for a TeenPride prom are still up in the air but amazing contributions have already been made to help with decorations and more. The prom theme will be "make waves." This is a motto that reminds everyone that making social waves is the ultimate goal of the Berrien County GSA, even if those social waves are just offering a safe place for people to be themselves. After all what do 80's movies, poofy dresses, and awkward photo ops all have in common?

People expressing who they are. This is what prom should be about.



Teen Pride: Berrien County Gay-Straight Alliance

Join this GROWING Group! Amazing numbers are showing up so don't miss out!

LGBTQ Teens & ALLIES Ages 14-18

Hang out, celebrate LGBTQ people and ALLIES!

3rd Saturdays, 2-5 PM:

We're on the MOVE!
April 19 @
[Joel E. Smilow Teen Center](#), 190 W. Empire, Benton Harbor



Come help with decorations for Teen Pride Prom, 2014!

Additional Meetings:
May 17
June 21

Teen Pride on Facebook!

Reparative Therapy in Berrien County??!



The Road to Oz

By Ron Robinson

After a long day at work recently, I was relaxing and watching T.V. when I got a phone call from a gay friend of mine. He was upset, angry, and disappointed over what had happened at his appointment that morning with another clinician where I work. The story tumbled out: he had seen a book prominently displayed in the office proclaiming the success of "Reparative Therapy" (also known as "Conversion Therapy"), and how it could successfully change LGBT persons from being "homosexual" into being straight.

I hung up the phone, dazed: I couldn't believe this practice was still raising its ugly head after the American Psychological and American Psychiatric Associations had come out against it. *How could this message be promoted by a fellow professional? This? In an agency that had been supportive of me through my nearly 30-year career working as an openly gay psychotherapist? Does the administration not know this is happening? If they don't, who's going to tell them?* Surely someone else would step up and enlighten them on the harm being done to LGBT persons seeking services from this clinician. *Would I have to step forward again?* My sense of relaxation had completely eroded and my attention shifted to my growing sense of anxiety, which stayed with me for the rest of the night.

This challenge of mustering the courage to step forward and point out wrongs against LGBT persons is not new for me. I am here to tell you: I am just like the Cowardly Lion in the "Wizard of Oz" who has difficulty recognizing his own courage. Would I have enough courage to step



Whole Lives, Healthy Lives: Adult Support Group

Thursday evenings, 7-9 PM

A great opportunity to connect with a supportive environment. Stop by to find out more and join a great group of folks!

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OutCenter on Facebook:



forward and advocate for my own rights as a gay man, much less the LGBT community's rights? The answer was that I didn't know, based on the way my gut was churning.

There had been many years on my Cowardly Lion's journey toward Oz when I just kept quiet and didn't make a peep. But eventually, I thought, I should say something for fear I would erase all the steps I had made just to come out to myself. I found ways to speak up. When my straight friends would share humorous stories about their husbands, wives, or partners, I would join in and talk about the funny things I encountered with Joseph, my gay partner, that were similar to what they were talking about. I saw that by doing this, in my own small way, straight persons would begin to realize that my gay relationship was not that different from theirs. I also discovered that this step would not tax my courage too heavily.

After some time, I felt ready to take my next step: referencing my relationship with shop keepers, cashiers, and waiters at the restaurants in our town. Once I opened up, it felt like I was blabbing about who I was with everyone around me. I discovered that others often took their cue of how to relate to me as a gay man from me. When I was open and relaxed about whom I was, I found others were relaxed with me as well.

With each step I took, I became more confident in being out and found myself saying "yes" to much riskier opportunities to talk about being gay. Joseph and I were interviewed by the South Bend Tribune when Michigan was voting on the defense of marriage proposition. There was a picture of us with our dog, Dorothy, on the front page of the Sunday edition.

I had even mustered up the courage to speak on LGBT issues at work. I was asked to share my coming out story at a "Lunch and Learn" meeting to expand the workforce's understanding of diversity. This was a much scarier step. When it was announced that I would be speaking about what it meant for me to be gay, a couple persons wrote to the event committee demanding to know why I was shoving the gay agenda down their throats. Whoa...where's my courage now? I swallowed hard and decided to do it anyway. My mouth was dry, my hands sweating, and my fingertips freezing when I stood up to talk, but when I was done, the audience applauded, cheered and rallied around me for having enough courage to share. I thought I had arrived at Oz!

But now, after that disturbing phone call, I knew this journey probably had to continue, and I wasn't there yet. I had more courage to muster. Even still, I tried to find another way to get this done that wouldn't involve me. Who else could fill these shoes? I racked my mind to find a person who I thought could better articulate the argument, or someone who has training in changing group opinion. I kept trying to convince myself that I was not the one to do this. This is not my strong suit. But then I kept going back to the probable reality: those who could affect positive change at my job probably didn't even know Reparative Therapy was being promoted.

I decided: if the Cowardly Lion can make it to Oz, so can I.

I knew I needed to be prepared. I printed copies of what the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association say about Reparative Therapy. They both state that it is "harmful" and definitely not a therapy that clinicians should be recommending or endorsing. Then I found out that three states (New York, New Jersey, and California) have laws against Reparative Therapy, and Illinois is slated to ban this practice soon. I grew confident that with the right information, my agency would respond in a supportive manner. I figured out my talking points, and practiced what I was going to say.

Then I prepared an outline to work from when presenting it to my boss.

The morning arrived and, as I stood in front of my boss's door, I took a deep breath. I walked into her office and sat down and began to share. As I had suspected, she was not aware that Reparative Therapy was being promoted by a clinician in our agency. My boss then invited the Director of our agency to hear my concerns, and I went through the information again. Immediately, both of them gave the directive for the clinician's supervisor to remove the information from the office.

I felt proud of my agency for responding to the needs of the LGBT community. I felt proud that I had mustered the courage to speak up again.

On my journey to Oz, will there be other opportunities where I have to muster the courage to stand up? Yes. Will it be anxiety producing? You bet. Will it always have positive immediate outcomes? Probably not. However, I also know that by finding the courage to stand up, and by letting my often scared, singular voice be heard, I fill my pot of courage a little more. It is then that my small voice begins to resemble the roar of a lion.

Is Money More Like Oranges or Math?

Jerry Pfeiffle, Financial Services Professional
LifePoint Financial Group

When counseling clients and prospective clients it becomes readily apparent that, while most people have some sort of "Savings Plan," for the purposes of keeping one's head above water and putting something aside for luxuries, have-to-haves, and retirement, there is rarely any attention to the formation of a "Spending Plan." That's right, people typically have no clue what money they expend each month and wonder where the heck their paycheck went at month's end.

The simple answer is, aside from habitual squandering, out of every \$1.00 we earn, 40% goes to all forms of taxes, 30% goes to interest on debts, up to 6% goes to depreciation and we wage earners are at the end of the bread line 24% of that dollar. Yes, we get to enjoy 24 cents of every dollar. It's real simple to double that retention percentage through some simple strategies and self-imposed discipline in an initial meeting, as I can very quickly reveal how money in your personal economy is being ill spent, wrongfully positioned or unnecessarily spent altogether.



The average American makes \$2 million in their lifetime prior to mass erosion through taxes, living expenses and debt maintenance. At age 65 the average American retires with \$60,000 in assets (not cash alive on and at age 66 we are often compelled to return to some form of employment. What a wonderful financial plan...NOT! We spend our paycheck on utilities, mortgage/rent, debt, entertainment, food, auto, and charity. If we have a surplus we will 90% of the time spend it rather than save it. Why people look forward to a tax refund is beyond me as it only represents an interest-free loan to Uncle Sam and once you receive the refund, it is misconstrued as a bonus or gift card to be spent ASAP on unnecessary stuff rather than deposited into a savings account of sorts.

That begs the question, "Is Money More Like Oranges or Math?" Is money something that compels us to be rid of before it spoils or is it significant to retain? Money becomes something seemingly perishable and spending money becomes an emotional experience. It's not that we don't have money coming in but, rather, a lack of knowledge or prioritization as to what we spend that money on each month.

A brief visit with a competent financial services professional would provide you with a profound realization as to how simple habit changes and establishing a prudent financial strategy could result in significant savings and discover the greater importance of a "spending plan" in contrast to a "savings plan." There can never be a savings plan if we can't get a handle on our spending habits beyond our income.

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