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OutCenter



Serving the LGBTQA Community in Southwest Michigan

2012: A Year in Service to the Mission

Newsletter

February 2013

In This Issue

Mission-based Impacts

Social Media Maven Wanted!

Support 2013 Programs and Impacts!

[Donate](#)

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

All amounts count!
Please donate today!

Wish list:

- Gift cards to Staples for office supplies.
- Gift cards to Amazon for Library purchases.
- Coffee (decaf & reg), soda, bottled water for Youth and Adult support groups.

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Foundation Support



A Summary of Impacts & Accomplishments

The OutCenter, the only organization of its type in Berrien County, continued to serve lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning and allied persons and their families by providing support and advocacy that fosters respect and understanding of this community in Southwest Michigan.

In 2012, open for 242 days with an average of 3.6 walk-ins per day, the OutCenter was found for the first time by 143 people.

Why are these statistics important for the OutCenter in Benton Harbor, Michigan? Here are some observations...

Youth Program



The core activity of this program is ALIVE Youth. During 2012 this group continued to provide a safe place for LGBTQ youth to come together, discuss topics important to them, and engage with their peers and allies in social and creative activities. In a very real sense, ALIVE Youth is this community's GSA (Gay Straight Alliance). One day, when schools in the area support GSA's on their campuses, this group may no longer be needed. The OutCenter is working toward that goal.

In addition, the Youth Program also linked youth in need with LGBTQ allied therapists and counselors, and staff worked in partnership with area service agencies to expand the program's reach on behalf of LGBTQ youth and in service to the OutCenter mission.

The impacts on youth from this program during 2012: reduced sense of isolation, increased sense of self-worth, and mitigation of the effects of anxiety and depression.

Adult Program

The Adult Support Group, facilitated by a professional with a nine-year tenure as a volunteer at the OutCenter, continued to provide a rarefied and very important source of support in 2012. Monday evenings at the OutCenter adults convened and discussed important personal and professional issues, receiving empathetic responses, and compassionate feedback, as well as strategies to aid in navigating the complexity of being LGBTQ in Southwest Michigan.

Similar to the Youth Program, this program also linked those in need with LGBTQ allied therapists and counselors by way of referrals.

The impacts: beyond similar impacts mentioned in the Youth Program, a decreased sense of loneliness and increased sense of self-agency, and an increased sense of belonging in a community that cares.

Civic Engagement Program

The OutCenter participated in a state-wide call to action in support of

West Shore Aware

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domestic partner benefits. Staff and Board members went to Lansing and met with Senator John Proos and Representative Sharon Tyler to present and discuss the importance of LGBTQ rights to people and families living in Southwest Michigan.

This program also hosted the OutFilm in February screening "Brother Outsider, the Life of Bayard Rustin," with a follow up panel discussion about the life and work of this important African American gay and civil rights leader.

Co-organized with the Kalamazoo Gay Lesbian Resource Center, the OutCenter launched the annual Out of the Closet, Into the Light Conference. The conference featured sessions on how to build affirming faith-based communities, how to ensure schools are safe for LGBTQ youth, the benefits of LGBTQ inclusion in workplace diversity, and a dialogue at the intersection of race, religion and sexual orientation.

**Out of the Closet,
Into the Light**
 Speak OUT, Speak NOW

The impacts: increased visibility of local LGBTQ leaders in multiple arenas addressing multiple issues of importance, increased awareness of issues and challenges faced by LGBTQ people and their families in Southwest Michigan, and an increased sense of a growing community of people who care.

Library & Cyber Center

The Library, perhaps the largest and most diverse of its kind in Southwest Michigan, provided the LGBTQ community opportunities to learn about courageous leaders and the history of the struggle for equal rights, studies and advances in understanding human sexuality, and enjoyment of the terrific contributions made to society, arts and literature by LGBTQ scholars, artists, and authors.



The impacts from having this resource on site and actively used include: increasing the awareness and importance of courageous LGBTQ leaders and the history of the struggle for equal rights, academic advances in the study of sexuality, and a terrific representation of contributions to society, arts and literature by LGBTQ people.

Want to help the OutCenter in a MAJOR way? Read below.

Social Media Maven Wanted!!

- Do you enjoy Facebook and Twitter?
- Are you looking for an excuse to spend WAY MORE time on either?
- Are you committed to social justice and LGBTQ rights and want to help spread the good word?
- Then call Mary Jo Schnell today to learn about becoming the OutCenter's Social Media Maven! OCSMM. Why not?

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