



OutCenter

Celebrating
10
Years Proud



Serving the LGBT Community in Southwest Michigan

OUT & abOUT

Newsletter

February 2014

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2014 roared in!



And so did the OutCenter!

Many have been hard at work to literally transform the OutCenter. And, wow, are they succeeding...and they still have more they want to do!

The OutCenter mission remains steadfast: To provide support and advocacy for respect, understanding and NONDISCRIMINATION to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their families in Southwest Michigan.

Plans for 2014 are already in the works, too. Here are some highlights:

1. Increase size, diversity and capacity of Teen Pride: Gay-Straight Alliance of Berrien County.
2. Continue efforts to train and support allied agencies and organizations to become culturally competent, non-discriminatory and/or judgmental towards LGBT people and their families.
3. Review, update and put in place improved policies and practices that will create a safe place for all.
4. Review, update and expand the referral list to reflect the growing and changing needs for support and advice for LGBT people and their families.
5. Continue to support Whole Lives, Healthy Lives and the now 5 volunteer professional counselors that provide critical expertise and guidance in a group setting.

Please do contact the OutCenter directly if you wish to become a part of this great organization and help...

...Bring Equality to Southwest Michigan!

Teen Pride in February: A great turnout with great people!

By MacKenzie Carlock & Claire Postelli

With the smell of pizza in the air and music playing in the background, the February Teen Pride was a coming together with a larger turnout than we've seen in recent years. This month's theme was "Love Is Love," inspired by Valentine's Day, a celebration of being who you are and loving yourself. A total of 18 people, at least 11 teens, showed up for the meeting. Time there consisted of a brief yoga lesson



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.

Updates & events



Ch-, ch-, ch-, changes!

OutCenter creating a warm, welcoming, and safe place for all to be beYoutiful!

Thanks to the leadership, hard work and donations from: Sven Erickson, Sherry Becker, Shari Payne, Nina Molter, Tami Miller, Chad Kalkman, Brad Bigford, and Brian Leadbetter!!



Teen Pride: Berrien County Gay-Straight Alliance
 LGBTQ Teens & ALLIES
 Ages 14-18
 Hang out, celebrate LGBTQ people and ALLIES!

3rd Saturdays
 @ The Phoenix, 2-5 PM:
 March 15
 April 19
 May 17
 June 21

Teen Pride on Facebook!



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!

info@outcenter.org
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Foundation Support



Frederick S. Upton Foundation



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(think breathing exercises, not making bodies turn to pretzels), crafts, food, and getting to know each other.

After everyone arrived, a small scale yoga session was led by Adrienne Alane White. Since everyone was relaxed by the anxiety-free time, a resounding "yes" came when they were asked if they would like to continue in their brand new yoga journey.

Adrienne will be returning for the March meeting due to the teens loving her relaxing style. Once everyone was breathing easy, Silver Beach Pizza, generously provided by Jay Costas, was devoured by anyone that was hungry. If pizza wasn't their thing, cookies made by some of the teen leaders were also provided-another example of the awesome work that is being put into the Gay Straight Alliance.

The next hour was spent planning for possible future events, making crafts, and overall bonding.

There were things like construction paper, crayons, and glitter glue to make valentines and materials to make simple bracelets.



Our GSA keeps growing with each monthly event. Some members have expressed the want for a GSA in their schools and we hope to be an example to help them reach this goal. It's vital that all people have a place where they can feel safe. As that happens here with Teen Pride, we are beginning to see the amazing community work that can take place when a comfortable environment is provided.

The GSA shows that it really is all about teens leading teens and exploring things through leadership.

We look forward to the next Teen Pride GSA and hope to see an even higher number of attendees. March will be a celebration of the color green, inspired by Saint Patrick's Day, and another platform for people to look forward to the future that Teen Pride holds for its growing number of members.

Equality...a parable.

By Gloria Weberg

Equal - like or alike in quality, degree, value, etc. - the same rank, ability, merit. So says the dictionary.

I remember a time in my life when I experienced a "happening" that left a message I never forgot. I must have been about 12 or 13 years of age. My family of six lived in a two-bedroom apartment. The janitor of the building lived in the basement with his wife and two children. One day my mother greeted him as usual and noticed that he was not his smiling self. Upon mentioning this to the janitor, he explained that he and his wife had to make a trip down South to the funeral of his wife's mother but could not take the children. This prompted my caring mother to say "not to worry, I will take care of your children." The response of the people in the building was "Really? You are going to take those children into your home?" My mother just said "Yes," and ignored any further negative comments. As you may have guessed, the children were black.



Today, we must say "yes" and take up the challenge of the ignorance that now exists when people respond harshly to our LGBT community. There are many ways to reach out and touch the lives of those who love and share their lives with people of their choice as an equal part of this society.

We are fortunate in that we have an established place called the "Outcenter." It provides support for youth, young and old with the information needed, the nurturing needed, the education needed and most of all a "welcoming friend."

WMU Intern in the Spotlight!

Rumor in the Art's District is there has been a new face at the OutCenter since July, but who is it and what is she doing?! Well that new face belongs to me - Melissa Hammer, and I have been enjoying every minute - 18,000 minutes and counting - at the OC!

I am a second year student intern in pursuit of my Master of Social Work degree. I

OutCenter on Facebook:



chose Social Work because there are many people without equal rights in the world, more importantly in my community, and I would like to be an agent of change. I have networked with the OC in a previous job and was impressed by the organization and its mission statement.

I myself am an Ally; from having childhood friends to family members belonging to the LGBT community, I LOVE this community! There is no other community that accepts people for who they are more than the LGBTQIA community. Who wouldn't want to intern here?!

Since July I have been researching the best practices among similar agencies and organizations, focusing on youth policy. I have created a rather large document to be considered as part of a Policies and Procedures manual, including a variety of topics such as confidentiality, referrals, the cyber library, the GSA, and emergencies. I am currently researching and expanding a referral guide that will include legal services and attorneys as well as open and affirming clergy and congregations. I also get to work with the GSA - 'Teen Pride', which has been A LOT of fun.

Before I get back to the grind, I just wanted to do a 'shout out' to Mary Jo and the Board at the OC. Never in my short career of 15 years in non-profit organizations have I ever seen such a committed and giving team. Even on the weekends, the board and volunteers are working at the OC, constantly striving to reach everyone's vision of what an OC can be.

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