

Notes

GLBT Wellness Youth Focus Group

Approximately 30 youth participating (we had an hour with them).

We broke into three groups around 3 different topics:

- o **School**
- o **Connection to GLBT community**
- o **Emotional Well-Being**

School

(Yvan facilitating, Louise taking notes)

Introduction: So, let's focus on schools and how they could support the wellness of GLBT youth. The survey found that 54% of youth said they can't be themselves at school; 76% say they're not out to their teachers.

What's your experience at school?

- o Don't understand being out to teacher – why would you? Maybe one or two who you are friends with
- o Not intimate or close with other teachers
- o Afraid it will get around – teachers gossip
- o A teacher stopped me in the hall to ask if I was having a problem because they had heard things
- o Schools don't respect the privacy of the pupils
- o It would be a sign of wellness to be out – the fact that we could would be an improvement. I'd not tell them my religion or income, so why come out?
- o All teachers know I'm gay. It can influence teachers in not saying homophobic things or controlling what student's say. When I heard a homophobic comment from a teacher, I said "I'm gay, I'm out and I don't want to hear this"
- o Curriculum is heterosexist. Canadian Families course in Catholic schools is the worst.
- o Being out makes teachers aware that there are gay and lesbian students and they may be more sensitive
- o When there is a relationship established it is easier to come out
- o With some teachers we talk about life issues, so I can be out to them
- o I came out to my society teacher – it made not difference – her take on the family was heterosexist and she still made homophobic comments
- o Things are improving – I am out to anyone who wants to know – only one negative comment this year. People's tolerance in general is improving. People admire me for being out.
- o Not only students hiding GLBT status but teachers also --- when asked why teachers can't answer.
- o A teacher at Woodroffe was told not to come out because it would be a bad influence on students.

- o School does not want bad publicity that comes from it having openly gay teacher.
- o Merivale High School --- don't think it would be an issue if teacher came out because the principal is gay positive and vice-principal is lesbian.
- o Mr. Hill made a homophobic comment to a lesbian. He is not gay-friendly. "I guess this picture belongs to the boys..." when he saw picture of women in her locker.
- o My school is very multi-cultural, the diversity helps the overall atmosphere --- you can't isolate gay and lesbian issues. Gay and lesbians are present in every culture.
- o Young teachers helps with tolerance and gay positiveness, so change will happen over time just like with racism.
- o By promoting general acceptance of multiculturalism you will promote acceptance of GLBT.
- o You are not only gay or black or muslim, we are all multi-faceted. I said "I don't like sports." The reply was "are you gay?" I answered "that I was bi." It was not a big deal because his sister is a lesbian.
- o Being a queer person of colour --- homosexuality is seen as mainly a white thing. Need to promote the fact that there are disabled gay people and coloured gay people.
- o Need to identify as more than one thing as opposed to only gay, we show multi-layered lives.
- o General attitude – WW2 not our war. Race does not affect me because I am not black.
- o Young teachers can discriminate too. Did not know where I fit because I am a catholic lesbian. I came out to one of my older teachers and was totally accepted.
- o Religion teacher was a nun – was talking about marriage, children, etc. She said homosexuality is morally wrong. I stood up and complained – sent me down to the office (2-3 years ago). Roman Catholicism has been around too long to be changed – you are going against the son of god. RC schools have a lot of hardliners.

Who shifted school because of discrimination? 3 of 9

- o Public schools are not better
- o Homosexuality more accepted amongst girls than boys.
- o Glebe is best, Canterbury is also good for GLBTQ.
- o Most girls are totally cool with it, but men would love to see two women at it so lesbianism more accepted.
- o Girls don't demean themselves by being gay but men do because they are effeminate.
- o Within 2 hours of coming out to locker neighbor the whole school knew. Created difficulty because it was a new school but made him a better person.
- o Women's homosexuality is so better accepted. Masculinity is challenged. A masculine gay boy would have less problem than an effeminate one.
- o Partner goes to Immaculata H.S. When she came out she was asked for pamphlet and report so that they could help others.
- o Some of the most accepting people at school are the jocks and masculine guys.

- o Prep/pop culture is very gay now. It is "in." Fashion is gay.

- o Schools have difficulties
- o Taxi drivers – Lebanon, muslim, Iraq, catholics. An acquaintance took cab with partner holding hands – kissed – taxi asked them to get out of car. Did not and taxi driver became aggressive.
- o Majority is not totally straight or gay and it is ok to be in between.
- o Difficult for me to come out because father is very religious. If newsletter could be sent out with numbers to call to get info.
- o People have to realize you can be gay without being the stereotype.

Transgender

- o Never had an experience with transgender in her school – the way teachers present material is very traditionally gender biased.
- o Transgenders have more difficulty than GLB
- o People laughed at a MTF who fell rollerblading

Connection to GLBT Community

(Anne facilitating, Barry taking notes)

Introduction:

Most youth said they get most of their emotional and social support from GLBT friends. While 64% said they feel they belong to the GLBT community in some way, 73% feel that their sense of belonging is somewhat or very weak. 27% volunteer in various places; and 45% said they'd be interested in becoming a volunteer in the GLBT community.

So, what is your experience of belonging to the GLBT community?

- o **Looking for Alternatives to the Bars to Gather**
 - o I feel connected because I'm part of it, but I also feel disconnection. Like with Pride -- people seem to be connected for a while. It feels big for a week, but then there's nothing.
 - o It is hard to connect all youth – it is a closed community
 - o I turned 19 and I went to a bar and it was like school – everyone knows everyone.
 - o I feel very connected to friends, but I cannot go to bars – unless you know someone or a sleeping with the doorman, you can't get in.
 - o **Alternatives to Bars:** The only way to get to know someone is to get drunk. I need a snow-boarding partner
 - o There are communities within the gay community. You do not need to get drunk. I'm 21 and have not got drunk. There is a need for other ways of meeting. I write poetry, and I would never read it out loud to my straight friends.
 - o Yeah – there should be coffee shops, poetry readings, art classes, not just sports
 - o A web site for youth would be good.

- o On-line it is just sex sex sex. A chat line is so impersonal. You want people you can meet.
- o I came out very young (less than 13). Young people know they are gay younger. It is great in Toronto – there are non-alcoholic nights at the bars. You shouldn't have to go to a bar to meet. People come on to you - - it's a pick-up atmosphere. Sometimes PTY feels like that too.
- o **Pride:** The highest turnout at Pride is youth, but the major events at pride are off limits for those of us who are under-age. There should be an all-youth event at Pride.
- o Youth do not have money so Pride is not interested
- o YSB should not be just East and West. It's a long way to go.
- o **Retail/Shops:** In Toronto and Montreal, it's more open, but here, we don't have much in the way of gay positive shops.
- o We need places to hang out without loud music: a community centre; everyone goes to the Elgin Diner, with lips zipped.
- o Ottawa is really big now. Even Kanata has a really big gay community but you would never know it. We found out from a couple we met there that there are 52 gay couples living in /Kanata but "there are no gay people there". Alex Munter's fruit cocktail party was great – we felt really good to be invited to that.
- o **High schools:** High schools are so closeted, especially downtown. The principle at Lisgar said there was no homophobia in his school because there are no homosexuals there.
- o In the school, when you ask a teacher to set up a special event like open gym or art classes for just gay people, they say you're being exclusionary. But, gay groups are a forum to meet people who will be there for you.
- o Since I came out, 37 people have come up to me at high school. We have signed a petition for the principal to get a gay group going.
- o We need to start *Straight-gay Alliances* "We do not want support, we want acceptance – there's a difference". Where I came from, every school except the private ones had a gay-straight alliance. They had a festival in May and it was great.
- o **Role Models:** There is such a need for role models. When your parents say you cannot be happy on the path you have chosen, I can say "no, look at him and him".
- o **Safety:** A year and a half ago I got gay-bashed. The hate crimes unit is really good. Ottawa is so safe. People need to be informed about it. The year before I was beaten up and did nothing about it, but this time, I went to the Hate Crimes unit and they were in court within a few days.
- o **Support:** I knew I was strange from the time I was in Grade 1, but until Grade 12 lived a life of confusion. We have to save these children.
- o CAS should have training about gay kids.
- o We need about 4 hours to talk about this.

Emotional Well-being

(Brian facilitating, Kerry taking notes)

Introduction: Thought numbers low – they thought more like 70% depressed.

What this means to you?

- o Nothing will get better. Hopelessness.
- o Those who are depressed won't fill out survey, may not access internet from home if family relationships are stressed.
- o Family dynamics is debunking stereotypes.
- o Parents are fearful for you and you feel guilty about that.
- o Public awareness is raised but new problem is now they look for it.

Services – have you looked for them?

- o Community – needs to reach out when kids are in trouble, too passive, some had attempted suicide, where do they find out, isolation big issue.
- o Psychologist told her he didn't agree with being gay, he hated the gay thing and wanted her to find another doctor.
- o Even family doctors are not open about their feelings.
- o Maybe some outward signs like rainbow flags?
- o Higher numbers in lower age groups.
- o Coming out to friend helped.
- o Just maturing helped.
- o Religious family and beliefs make this hard.
- o Clergy is worse than psychologist but that doesn't address the spiritual issues.
- o Outward signs eg. rainbow on door.
- o Take some pressure off. More difficult for guys.
- o Rural community is really isolated. No services, sometimes family doctor in rural community.
- o Even friends are supportive but can't relate.
- o Having to pretend because you know who you are but can't talk to anyone. Usually coming out to parents helps.
- o Having a queer friend to be around helps role model.
- o Using the internet to alleviate isolation but one-dimensional.
- o Wearing Pride Wear is for themselves and to reduce others isolation.