



## **Mission**

YPI's goals are to meet the social, emotional and educational needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQQ) youth and their allies through empowering programs of support, education, organizing and advocacy, while working to change the homophobic, biphobic and transphobic environments in which they live, work, study, play and pray.

## **Vision**

YPI's vision is to build a strong and vocal community of youth and their supporters in order to allow LGBTQQ youth and their allies in Rhode Island to be heard, accepted and nurtured. The future we strive to create is one in which current prejudice against LGBTQQ youth and their allies has been eliminated, and LGBTQQ youth, young adults and their allies are empowered to live healthy, full lives.

## **Values**

YPI recognizes the essential nature of youth-driven programs that combine elements of advocacy, support and empowerment. We understand the importance of empowering young people to make change and the necessity of supporting them in doing so. To that end, YPI sees youth development, leadership and organizing as fundamental elements to successful youth work. YPI encourages young people to be leaders within the organization and community, and develops programming to facilitate this process.

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YPI administers an entire spectrum of programs including a Drop-in Center, basic needs services, social support and activity programs, anti-bias programs, and leadership development opportunities. YPI offers opportunities for LGBTQQ youth to explore their identity, family, leadership and community in a safe, respectful, and affirming environment. For most participants, their experience with YPI is the first in which they can talk, listen and support one another. Their stories are compelling and profound and joyful and sad. Connections at YPI make the isolation less stifling, the celebrations more exuberant, the hurt less deep, the friendships lasting. In short, YPI offers LGBTQQ youth a place where they can dare to be themselves.



**Anti-bias Programs** include:

- ✓ Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) Coalition Organizing Project provides training and technical assistance to youth activists with the goal of providing skills to spearhead organizing and social change efforts in their communities.
- ✓ OUTspoken is a community education program that provides youth-to-youth and professional development workshops to discuss the impact of homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism, and provide tools to create change that leads to safe, inclusive communities for LGBTQQ individuals.

**Leadership Development Initiatives** include:

- ✓ Program Assistants are young people given additional responsibilities and a stipend to coordinate program activities. Supervised and supported by staff, these positions allow a focused way to develop and enhance professional, group and interpersonal skills.
- ✓ YPI's Board of Directors is committed to involving young people at the decision-making table. A minimum of 25% of the 15 available board seats are reserved for individuals under 23 years of age.
- ✓ The OUTspoken Playaz are a performance group who entertain and educate people on subjects that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQQ) youth face in their day-to-day lives. The Playaz utilize open discussion, original skits, poetry, and exercises to generate conversation and to increase awareness of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, coming out, and heterosexism. The Playaz increase awareness and understanding for non-LGBTQQ people by empowering queer youth to use their voice and life experiences to create positive change in their community.

Programs within the cluster of **Social and Support Programs** include:

- ✓ The Drop-In Center houses computers, a lending library, food pantry, a TV/VCR, stereo and kitchen, to create a safe, youth-centered space for YPI programming. Age-appropriate Social Networking and Support Opportunities help youth to develop positive, healthy peer, to relax and have fun in a safe, nurturing environment, and to participate in community-based activities.
- ✓ The Way Out is a weekly peer support group, and is an original component of YPI's support services providing young people the opportunity to explore identity, family and sexuality, as well as the impact of trauma, violence and discrimination.
- ✓ Individual and Family Counseling and Crisis Intervention Services are integral aspects of creating a safe and supportive center. Case Management Services provide the link between support and advocacy, coordinating care among numerous systems (i.e. medical, mental health, legal, victim compensation, family, education, etc.).
- ✓ Academic Tutoring and GED Preparation Support is provided by volunteers, focusing on academic performance without fear of negative perception and consequences of identifying as LGBTQQ.



Violence, threats of violence and harassment make many places unsettling and unsafe for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQQ!) individuals. Commonly, LGBTQQ youth find it difficult to concentrate and focus in most contexts, and many hesitate to participate in activities designed for this age cohort. This reticence creates emotional and physical distance from opportunities to engage in age-appropriate support networks and to have normative social, emotional and educational experiences. Consequently, LGBTQQ youth development as well as their ability to successfully transition to adulthood is negatively impacted.

Using National Census data and a conservative estimate of 5%, we know there are approximately 8,800<sup>2</sup> lesbian and gay youth ages 13-23 in Rhode Island. And still, homophobia remains an acceptable form of prejudice. Perhaps most negatively affected are LGBTQQ youth who find themselves growing up as targets of this hatred. Internalized homophobia and fear of rejection often lead to emotional, social and cognitive isolation, which all too frequently cause elevated rates of depression, anxiety, substance use and other high-risk behaviors. The following statistics bear stark evidence of harsh realities:

- **75%** of students heard derogatory remarks such as "faggot" or "dyke" frequently or often; **89%** reported hearing "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" - meaning stupid or worthless- frequently or often [GLSEN 2005].
- **37%** of students experienced physical harassment at school on the basis of sexual orientation and **26%** on the basis of their gender expression; **18%** of students had been physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation and **12%** because of their gender expression [GLSEN 2005].
- **19%** of students heard homophobic remarks from their teachers or other school staff [GLSEN 2005].
- **23%** of students of color experienced physical harassment due to their sexual orientation alone, and **13%** due to both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity [GLSEN 2005].
- Gay and lesbian youth are **2 to 3 times more likely** to attempt suicide than heterosexual young people. [Rotheram-Borus, M., Hunter, J., & Rosario, M. 1994].
- According to a 2006 report, between **20 and 40 percent** of homeless youth in the US identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. **26%** of LGBT youth who come out to their parents are told to leave home. Many also report experiencing abuse both from family members and in shelters. [Ray, N. (2006)].
- **65% of 400** homeless LGBTQ youth report having been in a child welfare placement at some point in the past. [Berberet, H. (2006)].

Additionally, LGBTQQ youth are frequently denied their history and have their existence distorted or ignored. The LGBTQQ community is alone in its lack of generational ties and supports. Other religious, ethnic and racially-similar communities have built-in mentors such as family, institutions, churches and organizations to tie youth to elder role models. Because the LGBTQQ community is not one tied together through blood or religion, we are in the unique position of otherwise seeking appropriate role models and mentors.

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<sup>1</sup> The term LGBTQQ is used to refer to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning. Although *queer* is often used in a derogatory manner, it is a word that is being reclaimed by many academics, activists and young people as a source of power and pride. Thought to be inclusive of both gender identity/expression and sexual orientation, its use is controversial and not uniformly accepted. Youth Pride, Inc. chooses to use it out of respect for those who identify as queer.

<sup>2</sup> This estimate does not include bisexual, transgender or questioning youth, as the data collected is not detailed enough to provide a reliable and valid approximation.



YPI's varied accomplishments highlight the multi-modal approach that we believe is most effective in both youth empowerment and systems change. In fact, youth often find their way to one kind of program through another. We understand that essential social services respond to some of the immediate needs youth present. We hold that unless we simultaneously provide opportunities for youth and young adults to test proactive, pro-social skills in a youth-driven framework, we compromise their social, moral, emotional, physical and cognitive development. Basic needs services allow youth to consider life beyond an urgent situation. Youth development opportunities provide a foundation upon which youth can build their lives. YPI's major accomplishments include:

- Provide over 600 hours of crisis intervention, counseling, case management and personal advocacy for LGBTQ youth annually
- Provide support and social services for over 350 youth annually
- Provide technical assistance to 35 high school and college Gay/Straight Alliances (GSAs) through the GSA Coalition Organizing Project
- Assisted 60 families by providing 7,800 pounds of food through our food pantry in 2007
- OUTspoken provided more than 60 trainings to over 1,200 youth and adults statewide in 2007
- Facilitated a Wellness Series consisting of kayaking, self defense, poetry, and art making that over 100 youth attended in 2007
- Spearheaded efforts to pass the Board of Regents policy banning discrimination based upon actual or perceived sexual orientation (1997)
- Assisted in the passing of Rhode Island laws to prevent discrimination based upon sexual orientation (1995) and gender identity/expression (2001)
- Created the first HIV/AIDS prevention street outreach program targeting youth in Rhode Island (collaboration with AIDS Care Ocean State, 1998)
- Conducted RI's first assessment of youth needs in HIV/AIDS prevention (2003)
- Founding community partner in the Providence District-Wide Student Government (2003)
- Assisted in the creation of the Providence Youth Council (2004)
- Developed PROUD Leaders, a YPI program providing LGBTQ youth leadership opportunities with a focus on community service and social justice (2004)
- Founding member of the statewide Youth Development Advisory Committee (reporting to the Governor through the Children's Cabinet)
- Developed and distributed the third edition of *Breaking the Silence: A resource guide to creating safe environments for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning youth*, a comprehensive resource for service providers, educators, youth, parents and administrators (2005)
- Convened the multidisciplinary RI Task Force on LGBTQ Youth (November 2005), submitted a statewide plan to address policy and data collection gaps regarding LGBTQ youth (March 2006), and convened Action Teams to implement the plan (September 2006)