

Long Island Business News

Offering safety and support to LGBT adolescents

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Published: November 18th, 2011



Less than 20 years ago, young adults who belonged to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender – or LGBT – community on Long Island were reaching out for support. Born from the [Long Island Crisis Center](#) hotline, [Pride for Youth](#) was established to address the needs of isolated young men and women who had nowhere to turn. Beginning with a small group of fewer than 10, Pride for Youth created an environment for individuals to meet their peers to talk about their challenges often for the first time.

"Our vision is to give people a safe environment to examine their own beliefs, to examine their way of thinking about the LGBT community and where they fit into the world," said Pete Carney, director of Pride for Youth. "By creating a safe space on a Friday night where someone can walk in and see that other people of the same sex are holding hands, it creates an environment void of fear and helps to revolutionize the way we all think and behave."

What is the main focus of Pride for Youth? Pride for Youth works to create a safe place for LGBT young people to meet peers, socialize and have the normal teenage experiences that everyone is entitled to – whether it be making friends or dating in a safe and protected environment. We achieve our mission by offering a matrix of opportunities and supports that assist LGBT youth with their healthy development; break obstacles to their success; and create a more responsive community in which they can grow.

How has [New York's Marriage Equality Law](#) impacted the LGBT community? The law is huge in the sense that it impacts the broader culture – it validates LGBT individuals and their relationships. As a society, we've grown more comfortable with the idea of people being gay, but still have difficulty accepting that they can be involved in loving relationships that include commitment and intimacy. Legalizing marriage validates that there is nothing wrong with being gay and gay married couples are accepted as members of society.

What programs does Pride for Youth offer? In addition to our counseling and support services, we have large community education program that is designed to reach more than 3,000 young people in middle and high schools throughout Nassau and Suffolk counties. We have a community educator who teaches workshops on homophobia, transgender and trans-phobia issues, free of charge to any school that is interested.

Is there a large demand for service within the school districts? Yes, we have more and more schools asking for these workshops and we often do not have the capacity to provide them because of funding and staffing limitations. Unfortunately, with the influx of young people coming in for counseling, it takes time for a counseling spot to open so we're always looking to the community for support.

How does Pride for Youth advocate for the larger community? We're very involved in youth-related advocacy. We were involved with organizing local LGBT youth to advocate in Albany on behalf of the Dignity for All Students Act, which was passed last September and provides protection in public high schools and middle schools throughout the state. Prior to this being passed, there were very little legal protections against harassment for LGBT youth, and we were very proud to be a part of that. Ultimately, we look to create a protected environment within schools and the community at large so that the LGBT community can be safe and free to pursue their ambitions.

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