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Group provides support for gay and lesbian youths

By Dirk Vinlove
Emerald Contributor

Editor's note: Due to the sensitive nature of this story, the last names of sources have been withheld to protect their anonymity.

A local gay and lesbian youth group provides support and friendship to a segment of the gay population that is often overlooked — those under 21.

The GALA youth group is actually a misnomer, according to co-facilitators Robin and Maureen. The youth group loosely links itself with GALA to provide a permanent phone number for interested people to call.

"We're not really part of GALA, we don't use anything but their phone number and a few dollars for printing posters now and then," Maureen said.

The group exists to serve three vital functions for young people — support, social situations and discussion. Support is provided mainly through meetings. The meetings start off with a "short check-in session" created by Robin and Maureen.

"The check-in lets everyone know where everyone else is coming from that particular

day. If you're having a great day, you will be different than if you've had a bad day and are attacking everyone at the meeting," Maureen said.

Robin and Maureen pass out small slips of paper to the group at the beginning of each meeting. People are asked to write down whatever they want to talk about that day. No identification is necessary at the time; each person can choose either to identify themselves on the paper or remain anonymous, Robin said.

The topics submitted for discussion range from questions about relationships with both gay and straight friends, to how parents accept them, to the loneliness that sometimes accompanies being gay. "Some people feel more comfortable discussing a problem if it's not directly linked to them," Robin said.

The youth group also provides a social outlet for its members through small parties and dances. As a fun and educational diversion the group decided to hold a "bring a straight friend night" at one meeting, Maureen said.

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