

Co-Publishers

Renee LaChance and Jay Brown

Editor Jay Brown

Calendar Editor Meg Grace

Staff Reporters

Anndee Hochman

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Jeff Fritz, LaVerne Lewis

Production Director Renee LaChance

Creative Director E. Ann Hinds

Typesetting Em Space

Proofreading K.C. de Gutes

Graphic Inspiration Rupert Kinnard

Distribution Diana Cohen

Contributors

Lee Lynch

Billy Russo

Dr. Tantalus

Steve Warren

Harold Moore

Sandra de Helen

K.C. de Gutes

Dell Richards

Bradley J. Woodworth

Michael S. Reed

Ian Young

Jack Riley

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Deadline for submissions is the 15th of the month preceding publication.

Out About Town is compiled as a courtesy to our readers. Performers, clubs, individuals or groups wishing to list events in the calendar should mail notices to *Just Out* by the 15th of the month preceding publication. **Listings will not be taken over the telephone.**

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PO Box 15117
Portland, OR 97215
(503) 236-1252

Steppin' Out

Photo by Jay Brown



Two shocking shoppers at Lloyd Center Dec. 17.

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P A G E T W O

Despite opposition, youth outreach grows

Programs aimed at gay youth are springing up across the country

BY DELL RICHARDS

Although homosexuality is legal in much of the country, giving emotional support and encouragement to gay adolescents still is a touchy subject. Opponents have called reaching out everything from "recruiting" to corrupting a minor. Even so, programs aimed at gay and lesbian youth are springing up across the nation.

Virginia Uribe, founder of Project 10, a gay and lesbian youth program, thinks programs that help gay and lesbian youth are essential — no matter what the opposition.

"Gay and lesbian kids are so enormously stigmatized," said Uribe. "And they internalize that negative feeling and for some of them, it's just so painful, they turn to drugs, or they try to kill themselves or they engage in high-risk sexual behavior. They drop out of school and end up on the streets."

One of the unwritten goals of Uribe's Los Angeles-based, Project 10, is to keep gay and lesbian students in school. Her organization works through the school system to reduce harassment of gay and lesbian adolescents by training teachers and other educators to be sensitive to gay and lesbian issues so that they can provide non-judgmental counseling.

The San Francisco-based, Project Open Mind, has taken another tack. It is trying to educate teachers and administrators to gay issues by getting parents — and interested gay people — involved with the schools, whether they have children or not.

Dallas-based National Gay Alliance for Young Adults, Inc. (NGAYA) has cast its net in a wider circle — to gay youth in all circumstances. Along with a youth hot-line and pen pal project, it also is currently creating a handbook for people who deal with gay and lesbian youth. In the future, it hopes to open youth weekend centers plus provide funds for scholarships and crisis intervention.

But despite the steps forward, gay adolescents still fall through the cracks. There are very



few statistics — of any type — on gay and lesbian youth. Very few studies have been done and the homophobia of many researchers has colored the findings in many cases.

"We don't know the statistics," said Uribe. "But it does appear that students who are dealing with issues of sexual orientation have a much higher risk of suicide. A lot of suicides that are unexplained are really the result of problems over sexual orientation but a lot of times, those things are hidden by the family," Uribe said.

Suicide isn't the only escape for gay and lesbian youth.

"We think that there is also a much greater risk for substance abuse because substance abuse is a real problem in the gay and lesbian community," continued Uribe. "But it's hard to determine whether that is because of internal pain — with alcohol being such a problem anyway."

A culture that is still very much based on bars

doesn't help young kids realize that alcohol, too, can be dangerous.

"Some of it is because of the socialization that comes about with bars. But we're trying to provide alternatives."

Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services, Inc. (GLASS) is providing alternatives for gay kids who have dropped out. The Los Angeles-based organization helps the thousands of runaways who end up on the streets of L.A. with the dream of a better life in sunny southern California shattered by the harsh realities of being broke, young, and gay.

All of these organizations risk censure from people who would rather pretend gay and lesbian youth don't exist or force them to become straight — no matter what the consequences. But in its own way, each group is doing what it can to make the transition from being a confused and scared gay kid to being a healthy adult-member of the gay community, a little less difficult.