

# Windfire

One of the few places where queer youth can go to be themselves and have fun

by Dandi Baunach, Melissa Kilby and Pamela Mullins



Windfire members include (top row) Christine, Mariam, Monica, Roxann, Tony, Dandi, Kronda (bottom row) Jo, Angela, Tracy, Melissa, Paula and Tina.

**D**o you remember when you first started feeling "different?" Do you remember feeling alone, as if no one else in the world felt like you? Didn't you wish you had a place you could go to talk with others about your feelings? For today's gay, lesbian, bisexual and unsure youth, there is such a place. It is called Windfire.

The idea for Windfire was started several years ago by a young man who went to Grant High School in Portland, Oregon. Windfire is a fun, safe, supportive space for gay, lesbian, bisexual or unsure youth under 20 years old to discuss their problems or joys...the atmosphere is really very open.

Honesty and confidentiality are two of the traits most upheld at every Windfire meeting. These traits are imperative in order to insure Windfire remains a safe space.

When kids first come to Windfire, they are usually isolated and have a great need to find more people like themselves. Most are nervous when they first arrive, but many also feel excited, happy, curious, glad to be there, and welcomed.

"I need a place to go with other people my own age," one young person shared.

After the nervousness wears off, youth who keep attending Windfire have the opportunity to meet new people, discuss issues important to today's gay, lesbian and bisexual youth and keep

up with the happenings and events in the gay community. There is also a need for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth to feel like they belong. Windfire has a supportive atmosphere where gay, lesbian and bisexual kids can feel comfortable enough to talk about their thoughts and feelings.

A typical evening with Windfire begins with "check-in." Check-in is designed for personal introductions at minimum. At most it is a time when the youth can briefly describe their previous week's events and bring up any important issues they would like to talk about. After check-in, the group discusses a wide range of topics, including gay, lesbian and bisexual relationships, ex-lovers, coming out to parents, school, activities, places to go, how to meet people, "Gaydar," sex and intimacy and much, much more.

Windfire plans activities outside of the meeting time. There have been beach trips, bowling parties, and picnics. And many people from Windfire "hang out" together after group time.

Windfire has been successful because there just are not many places for gay, lesbian or bisexual youth in the Portland Metro area. The bars cater to the 21 and over crowd and many groups or clubs in existence just do not have the capacity or want to offer topics for the special needs of the gay, lesbian and bisexual youth community. Windfire presently meets at 6 p.m. every Thursday at the Multnomah County Central Library at SW 10th and Taylor in downtown Portland. Check the door to the video room to see what room Windfire is meeting in. Those interested in more information on Windfire are invited to call Phoenix Rising at 223-8299.

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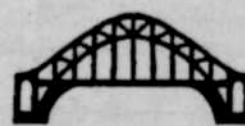
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