

local news

It's been nearly a year since Phoenix Rising Foundation Inc. launched the Pride Mentorship and Youth Services Project, a program designed to provide personal and social support to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and questioning youth. The project seeks to do so by pairing adult mentors with youth. As of late May, there had been one such coupling.

"There has been lots of interest expressed by adults," says Allanya Guenther, the agency's executive director. "The problem has been attracting youth."

The program, which is administered by Phoenix Rising, is a collaboration between that non-profit agency and Westside Youth and Family Services.

An estimated \$32,000 in Multnomah County contracts have funded the project during its first year of operation. Backers had hoped to pair 15 mentors and mentees within that time frame.

Sue Ziglinski, a county program development specialist, says to better make the case for continued funding for the project, she would like to see as close to 15 matches as possible by June 30.

Given that there has only been one match so far, that may be a tall order.

"I think this has been a real learning experience," Ziglinski says. "When this started, the idea was to get youth from the west side, but since that greatly limited the pool, that has been revised to include all of Multnomah County."

"We felt there was a lack of support for kids on the west side and that many services were already available to youth on the east side," Guenther says. "It turns out that we had difficulty getting kids from the west side."

She adds that various personnel issues, combined with the need to develop a program infrastructure, hindered outreach to youth.

"But we've addressed some of these problems," she says, "and we have a handful of possible matches in process."

One of the biggest barriers, however, remains locked in place.

According to Guenther, to partake in the project, queer and questioning youth younger than 18 must obtain written consent from their parents or legal guardians. (Mentees must be between the ages of 13 and 19.)

She says mentorship strategies and protocols meet the standards of Big Brothers/Big Sisters,

Anybody out there?

*A mentorship program for queer youth is all set to go—
all that's needed is queer youth*

by Inga Sorensen

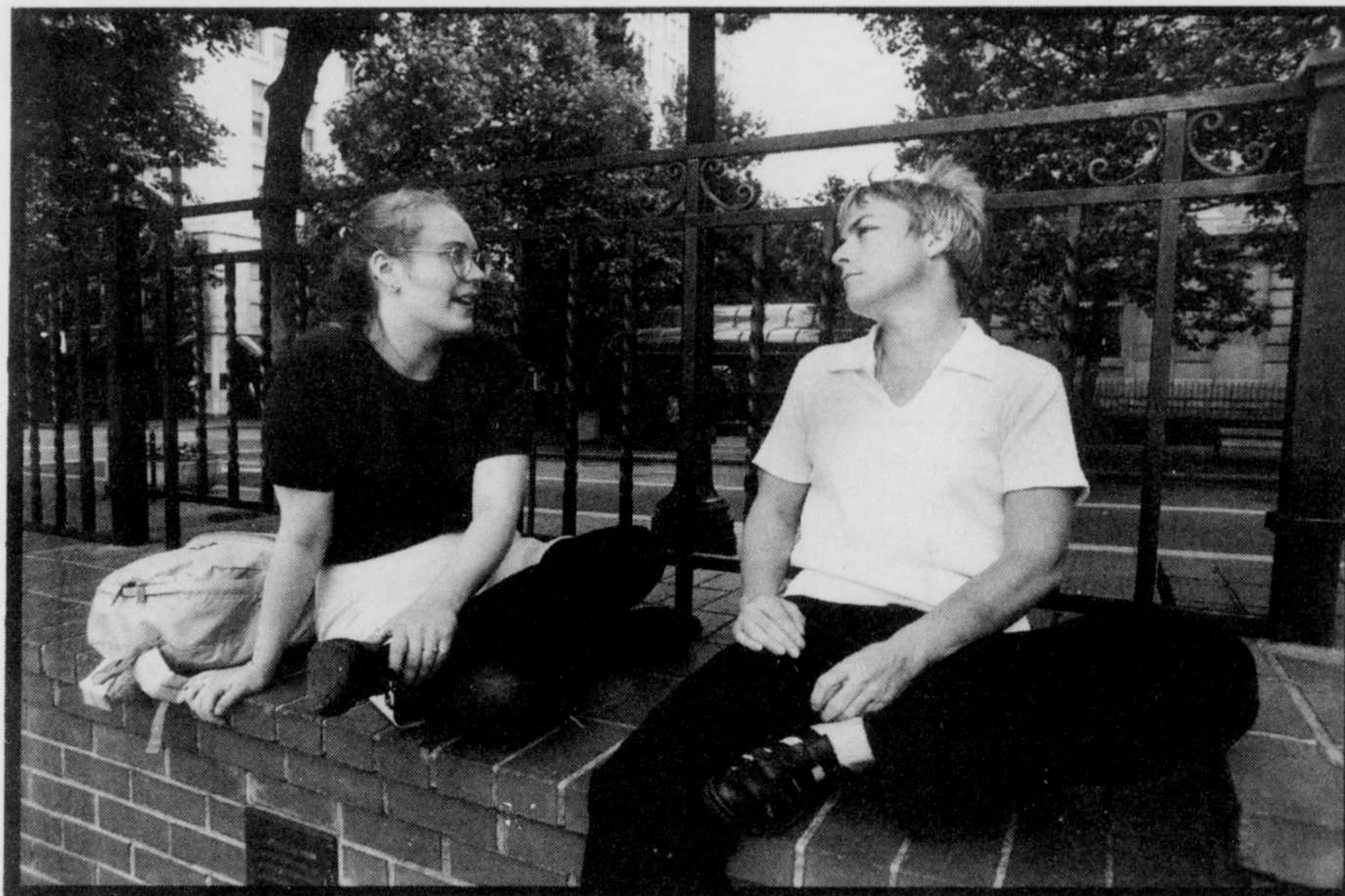
whose rules she says require legal guardian consent.

"We understand that this may make it more difficult when you're talking about sexual minority and questioning youth, but this program is designed for young people and their families. We don't want to foster secrecy and sneaking around behind parents' backs," says Guenther. "That's

several weeks back with 41-year-old Lisa Millet, coordinator of the Oregon Health Division's Fetal and Infant Mortality Review.

Larson, who was a legal adult when the match was approved, did not need parental consent.

She says that had she been younger, she would not have been able to obtain her mother's permission to participate in the project.



Colleen Larson (left) with mentor Lisa Millet

not very healthy."

As for those minors who would like to participate but believe they can't get permission, Guenther says they will be referred to a support group where they can strengthen their communication and problem-solving skills in preparation for coming out—or decide whether, how or when to come out.

At press time, the only mentee to be matched was 18-year-old Colleen Larson, who was paired

"I think the kids who could benefit most from this type of program are those kids who don't have supportive parents," says Larson. "It's really unfortunate, because this has been wonderful for me."

Larson says she "didn't have a picture" of what the project would be like but adds, "What it is, is absolutely perfect."

Despite their busy schedules, Larson says she and Millet have spent quality time touring local

gardens, watching videos, sipping java at local coffee haunts, hanging out with friends, and pondering Larson's educational and career prospects.

"We talk a lot," she says.

Both women have a deep interest in music and the arts—Larson has been a classical violinist since the age of 6 and also teaches international folk dancing. Millet, meanwhile, is active in the choral ensemble Bridges. In fact, at Millet's invitation, Larson recently attended a Bridges rehearsal.

Larson says, "At first I was afraid I would get a mentor who had preconceived notions of who I was."

A mentor, she says, who might balk at her long hair or the fact that she "likes pink."

"But it's been absolutely wonderful. Lisa really listens and she never lectures. She's there for me," says Larson. "If I had access to this when I was first coming out, I think it would have made it so much easier. Having supportive adults around really makes a difference."

Says Millet: "I really enjoy my time with Colleen. It changes my way of viewing things, and it's nice to know that you can make a difference.... While it may be the '90s, I think it's still difficult to be out and young."

Brandt Rigby, who took over as project coordinator a couple of months ago, says he is working aggressively to reach out to youth.

The 26-year-old admits that it's not always an easy sell when you're talking about teenagers.

"They say things like, 'What do I need another adult on my back for?' Stuff like that," says Rigby, who recently completed graduate study in social work. "Basically I plug it not as a teacher/role model relationship, but rather as a supportive and friendship relationship that both the older and younger person can benefit from."

Rigby acknowledges that he's under a great deal of pressure to muster matches by June's end.

"So who needs sleep in the next month?" he jests. "Yes, it's a lot of pressure, but I'm pretty sure we've got five more matches almost ready to go. I'll just keep doing the best I can."

Ziglinski, meanwhile, says she's pulling for the project: "The thing I'm concerned about is that people will think, 'If it doesn't work, therefore it can't.' I think we need to give minority populations the time and opportunity to work it out. The dominant society's rules and timelines don't always apply."



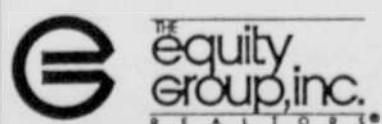
Celia J. Lyon

Sales Associate

YOUR REALTOR FOR LIFE



Serving the Community with Pride & Professionalism
Whether buying or selling, let Celia guide you through the Process



2100 N.E. Broadway
Portland, Oregon 97232
Assistant: Bill Douglas - x 146

ACTUALIZING YOUR DREAMS !

Celebrate Diversity

CALL NOW FOR INSTANT ACCESS :

Res.: 786-4959 Pager: 920-8403
Mobile: 260-6231



Office: (503) 287-8989 ext. 147
e-mail: CeliaLyon@aol.com