

GROWING PAINS

Lesbian Community Project membership gives thumbs up to changes, though not without a struggle by Inga Sorensen

The frustration was palpable. "As lesbians we are being invisibilized by our own organizations.... I would like to see more affirmation of lesbians," said one of the nearly 100 attendees at the Lesbian Community Project's annual membership meeting, held on a chilly mid-October evening.

The woman was far from alone with respect to her sentiment.

"What is so hard about stating this is an organization primarily for women and for lesbians?" asked another.

"Can a man be a lesbian?" belted a different voice.

Moments earlier, things seemed a tad more settled as LCP board members and staff stepped up to the podium to share the positive news: The \$35,000 debt that nearly wiped out the group two years back has itself been wiped clean; a growing spectrum of people are turning out for LCP forums, as well as sharing their ideas about how the organization

ject is committed to the individual and collective wellbeing of lesbians."

The new version starts like this: "The Lesbian Community Project is dedicated to building a world in which all human beings experience full justice, equity, democracy and liberation in all spheres of life."

Unlike its predecessor, it states LCP operates "with an open and evolving definition of lesbian community, which includes those who identify as lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning or other."

During a "clarification time" immediately preceding the vote, some asked, "What does 'other' mean?"

Some felt it meant men could conceivably take over LCP—a notion that was rebuffed by others who said it simply wouldn't happen. Others said they felt LCP—which they thought was a lesbian organization by and for lesbians—was being diluted.

The board assured attendees that was not their intent. Board

BYLAWS OF THE LESBIAN COMMUNITY PROJECT

Article I Name The name of this organization is the Lesbian Community Project (also referred herein as LCP).

Article II Purpose

A. The Lesbian Community Project is committed to the individual and collective wellbeing of Lesbians. We are working to build a supportive Lesbian Community that:

(1) is inclusive and rich in diversity;

(2) can move forward in areas of agreement, while acknowledging differences; and 3) can develop

Proposed change:

Article II. Purpose

The Lesbian Community Project is dedicated to building a world in which all human beings experience full justice, equity, democracy and liberation in all spheres of life. We are committed to being a multi-racial, multi-generational, cross-class,

Annual Membership Meeting
October 16, 1998

can be more responsive; neighborhood-oriented and anti-racist work, as well as work with youth, is getting off the ground; and the LCP softball tournament, a popular contest held each summer, continues to be a big draw.

Heck, just looking at the number of folks who turned out for the membership meeting was a sign of *something*, noted LCP staff organizer Deke Law.

"No one would ever come to the annual meeting," Law told those who came out for this particular gathering, which was held Oct. 16 at the Metropolitan Community Church of Portland. "Look at all of you here."

"I believe this is the first time we've had a quorum," chirped Liz Dueker, LCP board chair.

An article in the Sept. 18 issue of *Just Out* explained how the Portland-based LCP, a membership organization that had for 10-plus years bolstered the lesbian community via social and support activities, was, according to some sources, being pumped with a new energy fueled by a desire to make LCP a viable, responsive entity inclusive of many voices—lesbian, gay, straight, bisexual, trans.

At that point, the board was still crafting a reworked mission statement and changes to the bylaws, which were slated to be presented at the membership meeting.

As promised, the mission statement got a tune up and was served up to members for a vote—that's when some sparks started to fly.

LCP's past "statement of purpose" began with the words: "The Lesbian Community Pro-

ject is committed to the individual and collective wellbeing of lesbians." member Catherine Sameh added she believes LCP's focus on lesbians is "implicit".

Dueker, meanwhile, told the crowd the board felt it was important for those who are committed to LCP to be "accurately portrayed," hence the listing of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning or other.

Despite some edginess and discomfort, there appeared to be lots of support for the shifts.

One woman explained how she had gone to an LCP event in the early days and felt totally unwelcome. She told the board she appreciates the direction in which the organization is moving, and, for the first time, is feeling like she really belongs.

Another attendee asked naysayers, "What are you so afraid of?"

In the end, all of the proposed changes were approved by members at the meeting.

Among them, the board was approved by an 84-7 vote to serve a two-year term. The revamped mission statement was approved 66-21, with one abstention, and members voted 73-10, with five abstentions, that "all board members will be committed to LCP's anti-racist work. Reflecting this commitment, the board will strive to be at least 50 percent community members of color."

Men, who previously were limited to non-voting membership, will now be able to vote.

Dueker says: "There's a lot of emotion around change. Change is hard, but basically we're continuing the work we've always done, which is work for social change in a multi-issue way."



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