

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

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This reassessment effort got under way during LCP's annual meeting May 6. Leaders asked members to fill out questionnaires addressing a long list of issues, including some painful ones that almost brought the organization down in recent years when differing factions butted heads over who should be allowed as members.

"What kind of paid membership should LCP have?" one question read. "All women? Lesbians only? All sexual minority women? Anyone who supports LCP?"

Other questions were more philosophical. "Is it important that LCP continue? Why? Why not?"

The announcement about the office came as a shock to some members. Aspen says not everyone realized there wasn't enough ongoing financial support to keep it open.

But the unexpected news brought a positive reaction from others. Aspen says she was very heartened by people's willingness to help the organization transition to its new home.

Board chair Judith Applegate says the group is excited about the move because the YWCA believes so strongly in serving women. She called the move "a wonderful, serendipitous happening."

LCP has about 200 members and is run almost exclusively by volunteers. Aspen, the only part-time paid staff member, is scheduled to go off the payroll temporarily by the end of May to resume her summertime work schedule and is expected to return in the fall.

Board chair Judith Applegate discusses the Lesbian Community Project's future during the annual meeting May 6

Although LCP has gained strength in recent months with several successful programs under its belt, a lack of monthly pledges has kept the organization on the edge financially. Aspen estimates only six people regularly give money.

About one-third of the \$86,000 annual budget needs to come from the membership for LCP to stay afloat. (The rest comes from fund raising and grants.) "I don't think people realize how critical a \$10-a-month pledge is to us," Aspen explains.

It doesn't have to be a big donation, she says. Every small pledge "could make a huge difference in the viability of LCP."

Some say the organization is still in the process of healing after a several years of contentious disagreements about its mission and financial mismanagement. At one point LCP was \$30,000 in debt.

"The fact that we've come back from that and other challenges is really a positive thing," Aspen says. "Women are starting to see we're making things better for lesbians."

Especially important is the "healing work" going on at LCP since it took over the Conversations Project, Aspen says. The program brings together different groups that experience marginalization by the larger community with a goal of increasing understanding.

Whether bringing together elders and young people, lesbians and gay men, or lesbians of color and trans people, Aspen says the work helps heal communities.

In light of having a Republican president in the White House, she thinks now is the time to remain visible and organized, ready for whatever might "come down the pike." The lesbian community wouldn't want to face a challenge and wonder how and where they were going to organize, Aspen says. **J**

For more information about the LESBIAN COMMUNITY PROJECT call 503-233-3913.

LCP ACTIVITIES

Once the Lesbian Community Project gets its financial footing, Kristan Aspen says it then can focus on program development. Until then, the organization has several activities up and running.

The 16th annual Softball Tournament of Choice is coming up Aug. 10 to 12. A total of 32 teams from throughout Oregon, Washington and beyond will convene for the region's largest women's competition of its kind.

About 30 people attended the American Sign Language cultural night in April, including 10 Deaf people. The evening followed some well-attended ASL classes sponsored by LCP. Aspen says the organization has been trying to increase programming that reaches out to the lesbian Deaf community, which is at risk of isolation.

LCP recently received a grant from Equity Foundation to form "Options for Elders." The goal is to help develop housing options for elders so they won't have to leave the state, Aspen says.

Two of the four scheduled Youth Leadership Training Camps have been completed and were successful. LCP is co-sponsoring upcoming workshops with other area youth-oriented groups in June and October.

Board chair Judith Applegate says LCP is collaborating with Portland State University on two projects. The Graduate School of Social Work will work with the organization in its research about therapy, counseling and social services for the lesbian community. In addition, a PSU planning class has taken on LCP as one of its projects, working on a long-term strategy for the organization, including a re-evaluation of its mission.

The women have raised money during the past year for other groups. A dance attended by more than 100 people at Echo Theatre netted \$200 for Jean's Place. A spaghetti dinner raised \$650 for Basic Rights Oregon and the No on 9 Campaign.

LCP sponsored some old-fashioned fun during the year, producing a New Year's Eve party and silent auction with Love Makes a Family and the Portland Lesbian Choir. The organization also helped facilitate a number of new activity groups: lesbians with children, dance movement for menopausal women, a Spanish conversation/social group and a song circle.

LCP continues to sponsor support and social groups.

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