

At 23, Anisah Miley has been creating change ever since she can remember. Serving as one of four co-chairs for the upcoming Creating Change conference, as well as working at the African American Health Coalition in North Portland, she definitely has a full plate.

The young woman from Brooklyn, N.Y., relocated to Portland just after graduating from DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind. Considering her degree is in conflict studies, it seems appropriate that she was selected to make sure this year's conference offers something for everyone.

In its 15-year run, Creating Change never has had a theme, but this year organizers decided it was time. The focus will be "Building an Anti-Racist Movement: Working for Social and Economic Justice and Freedom."

Miley is thrilled about the topic, which the conference hasn't directly addressed in the past. "The community of queers of color is so small," she says, "it's interesting to me that Portland was picked as the place to introduce this theme."

Sponsored by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Creating Change is the largest annual gathering for the sexual minorities community. Miley has attended past conferences in Atlanta and Milwaukee. "I just remember tons of conversations in the hallways at the wee hours of the night," she recalls.

With the conference date approaching, this will give Miley a chance to create change on the national level. But her efforts also are known locally.

While working for AmeriCorps, Miley volunteered at the African American Health Coalition before being hired there as an HIV educator. The agency serves as a resource center to teach

CONFERENCE CALL

Anisah Miley joins the team of leaders who are creating Creating Change by Nicole Hooper



Anisah Miley speaks with volunteers during a Creating Change 2002 Host Committee meeting

underrepresented communities about various issues that help ensure their quality of life.

The coalition's staff members promote harm reduction by employing creative methods that are appropriate to the people they are serving. For example, they recently sponsored two events, one for youth and the other for adults, showcasing nationally renowned comedian Norman Mitchell and Darcy Padgett of the Bee Busy Foundation to educate on HIV prevention using humor. The gatherings not only provided laughs and information but also on-site testing.

Miley's coming-out experience was an uncommon one. She was 19 when she decided to identify openly as queer. Her family was very supportive, not surprising since she was raised in a two-mother household and has a gay brother.

Nonetheless, Miley feels it wasn't easy for her to come out. "I still had personal stuff to deal with like gender presentation, the multiplicity of my identity, being out on a rural college campus and first crushes," she asserts.

As a queer youth organizer at DePauw, Miley says she was the only openly gay African Ameri-

can woman on campus. This experience was often isolating but empowering for her. Miley says it made her seek out people who maybe didn't look like her but thought like her. This strengthened her feelings against racism.

"We get so caught up on how we look," Miley says, "we can't get behind that door. It becomes a barrier, and anti-racism can't be done. That's what this conference is about."

She hopes participants at Creating Change will take the information they receive in Portland and put it to good use as they go back into their communities to be advocates for anti-racism work.

The four-day event will start Nov. 6 at the DoubleTree Jantzen Beach. This is the first time the conference will be held in the Pacific Northwest.

Organizers are expecting more than 2,000 people with more than 150 workshops planned. Most attendees typically are younger than 24, but all are welcome. ☐

For more information about the CREATING CHANGE conference, e-mail creatingchange02@yahoo.com. To submit a workshop proposal, visit the Internet site www.creatingchange.org. The next host committee meeting will be held from 7 to 8 p.m. Aug. 21 in the first floor conference room at 123 N.E. Third Ave. Newcomers should arrive 15 minutes early to catch up on what's been happening so far. Organizers are still in need of people to help out with community housing, programming, hospitality and communications.

NICOLE HOOPER is a Portland free-lance writer.

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