

NORTHWEST newsbriefs

TELL THE FEDS TO BUTT OUT

Portland lesbian Cathryn Cushing is lobbying the U.S. government to continue helping queers quit smoking.

When federal objectives were set a few years ago, the sexual minorities community was recognized as one of those at risk of tobacco-related disparities. This significant advancement resulted in money for research, priority in programming, grant opportunities and nationwide legitimacy for a group with a probable smoking prevalence of almost twice the rate of the general population.

As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention prepares for a midcourse review, sexual minorities might be dropped from the objectives. The argument is that not enough statistics are available to measure against.

"The reason that there is not enough baseline data is because there has not been enough funding allocated to LGBT research by the CDC and other groups to collect the data," Cushing said. "This is an impossible Catch-22."

Cushing is asking supporters to submit comments urging officials to aggressively gather data about queer smoking prevalence, habits and attitudes. The deadline is Dec. 31.

Comments can be sent to healthypeople@cdc.gov or Monica Swann, Office on Smoking and Health, 200 Independence Ave., Room 317-B, Washington, DC 20201.



Kathy Belge says queer youth services are needed now more than ever

SMYRC LEADER RESIGNS

Kathy Belge has resigned as program manager of Vanguard Youth Services, which includes the Sexual Minority Youth Recreation Center. Her last day on the job was Dec. 19.

"I've been doing social service work for about 15 years now, and it's just time for me to move on and do something different," she said. "It's time to stop dreaming and start doing!"

After taking a three-month sabbatical, Belge plans on putting her 1989 journalism degree from Syracuse University to good use. She already is writing occasional free-lance articles for *Just Out*.

Belge said her decision to leave Vanguard was unrelated to the major cutbacks at Cascadia Behavioral HealthCare, which oversees the programs. The mental health agency laid off more than 100 people in October because of a funding shortfall from Multnomah County.

"My energy level isn't where it used to be for this kind of work," Belge said. "I think the program really deserves more than I can give right now."

Belge was hired as Vanguard's first case manager in April 1995 and was promoted in September 2000. "I think the thing I'm going to miss most is just...sharing the little daily triumphs of the youth—the getting a job, the 10 days sober, the new girlfriend/boyfriend, all those little things."

Belge said Vanguard has come a long way since she first came on board. At the time queer kids had no rec center, just support groups.

"That was pretty major—to have a county-supported position like that," she said. "There was nothing like that where I came from in New York."

Still, Belge regularly encountered youth who were kicked out of their homes for being queer. And even in progressive Portland, students continue to face discrimination on a daily basis.

"Just the other day our case manager...was doing a presentation at Lincoln High School of all places, and he was harassed by a group of youth," Belge said. "So on the one hand, I feel like we've come a long way; on the other hand, more than ever this place is needed."

Vanguard will restructure Belge's position and hire a part-time development person to raise money for the programs. A \$12,000 grant from the Portland Bureau of Housing and Community Development and \$25,000 in emergency funding from Multnomah County are helping keep SMYRC's doors open in the interim.

"There was a while there where it really looked like SMYRC was in danger of maybe closing; it does not look like that now," Belge said. "There were a few days there where I was a little scared—we all were."

Send donations to 2100 S.E. Belmont St., Portland, OR 97214.

ROUNDTABLE REGROUPS

The Sexual Minorities Roundtable, which is focused on improving the lives of queer street youth, held its monthly meeting Dec. 10 at Outside In. A total of 18 people were present, including representatives of the


Portland Police Bureau, Portland Leather Alliance and Pride Northwest.

In addition, several of the attendees were formerly homeless young adults now working as advocates with organizations trying to meet the basic needs of kids on the streets such as Outside In and Yellow Brick Road. These advocates proved instrumental in shaping the direction that the roundtable will go in during the new year.

The meeting's main agenda item was to figure out how to start communicating with queer street kids so the roundtable can learn from the source what sort of assistance would be helpful. The original plan was to hold a meeting where they could express their concerns, but as several of those who work directly with homeless youth pointed out, this is not a viable approach.

Representatives from Yellow Brick Road urged the roundtable to try to think as a street kid might. After some discussion, the group hit upon the notion of a simple survey to be sent out with volunteers from groups that

Continued on Page 9



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