

Courage in the classroom

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are and talk about it," she states. "If I don't try to make a change, how can I expect others to?"

Learning to make change

The coalition will be trying a few changes, too, when it presents the first of three annual safe school training workshops later this month at

Lane Community College in Eugene.

For example, the training will be set up for 10 teams of four, rather than open to individuals. Although this may reduce the number of communities involved, organizers believe that multiple advocates within the same community can better sustain their momentum through mutual support. "We've seen the difference even between just two people doing work together and someone doing the work by themselves," Liljeholm says.

And, unlike the 2001 session, this year's

workshop is not limited to just adults. "Kids will be doing a lot of the facilitating and presenting in order to model what we're hoping to encourage," notes Franks, citing the effectiveness of youth speaking for themselves and participating in decisions that affect their future.

The agenda will include not only material to present to students and faculty back home, but also an opportunity to practice basic public speaking skills. Teams will identify local resources to support their safe school plans and determine how best to utilize those resources. Finally, teams will learn how to organize local support groups for queer youth and allies, such as Gay Straight Alliances.

Ultimately, however, each team's approach will be unique. For instance, some may develop training for teachers, such as effective ways to identify and interrupt harassment.

Others may work with administrators to implement safe school guidelines, such as anti-discrimination and anti-bullying policies. Those with the basics already in place might choose to address curriculum areas in which sexual minorities are absent, such as health and history.

Working well with others

Another aspiration of the coalition is to link together local GSAs and similar types of organizations to create a statewide network. Lil-

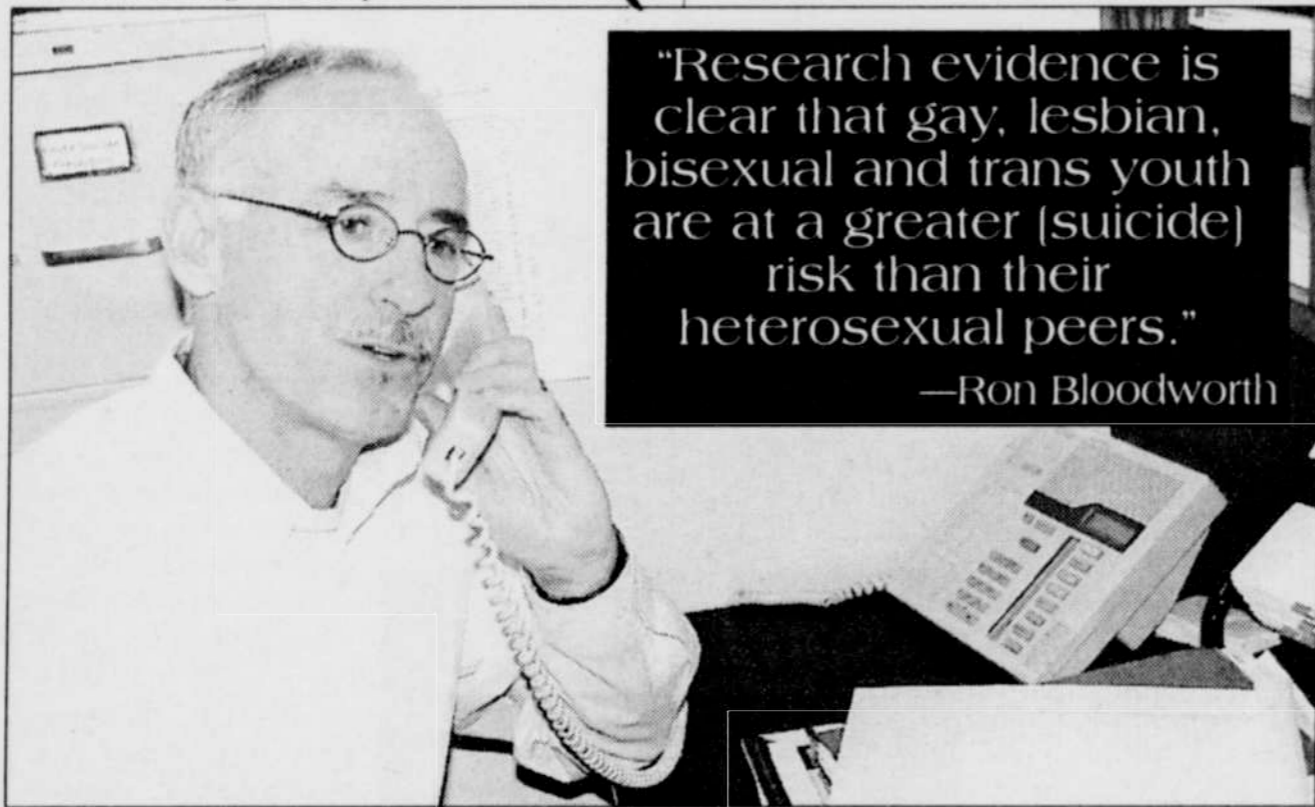
jeholm and Franks want to establish an infrastructure wherein members could share ideas, plan events and learn from each other. Although still in its formative stage and awaiting funding, the network is expected to be launched within three years.

Matt Hackett, a gay 17-year-old senior, supports such a networking opportunity. He's concerned about the future of a GSA he helped establish at Beaverton High School last September. He and a fellow student found a supportive teacher and an administration that gave immediate approval, but with growing classrooms and limited resources, the safe school message can be hard to hear among other serious problems.

In reality, it's one of a million issues on a



Molly Franks believes the coalition will be more effective because queer youth will be conducting many of the presentations



"Research evidence is clear that gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans youth are at a greater [suicide] risk than their heterosexual peers."

—Ron Bloodworth

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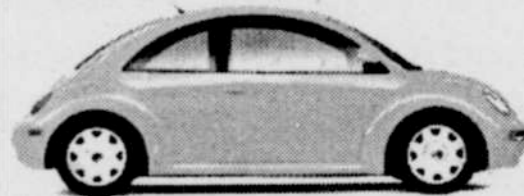
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