

outstanding Youth Focused

From piloting a project for the needs of queer and trans youth to establishing Saturday night drop-in hours, Rej Joo has found himself submerged in a body of social service work that benefits his community's youth in numerous ways. He is motivated to coordinate the Gender Odyssey Conference in Seattle and, for the first time, to establish a trans family congruence.

Alongside these projects, Joo concentrates on his research through the Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center. After finding that 40 percent of homeless teens identify as queer and live in a homophobic environment, he works toward increasing support and gaining funding from United Way.

Although his work leads the way, Joo has never given up on his dreams of becoming a doctor. He allows his dedication to youth to be his guiding light.

My name is Rej Joo.

I am known as a health education specialist at AmeriCorps for SMYRC and a queer youth advocate at Outside In.

I am 24 years old. I feel 24 years old. This is because I'm in a transitional stage in my life. I don't have a set career, yet I'm working hard towards my goals. That seems to portray someone who is 24.

Right now I am at SMYRC. I'm preparing for a Bridge 13 meeting. At this meeting we will educate community members about the needs of LGBTQ youth.

I had two childhood ambitions. The first, which I abandoned, was to be a professional basketball player. The second goal was to be a doctor; this I am still in pursuit of. This fall I am going to start the application process for medical school. Although I love the work I'm doing right now, I have a deep desire to follow my medical dreams.

My first queer crush was on a teacher. It was when I was 6 on an art teacher at an after-school program that I attended. I don't remember a lot about it; I just know that the feelings were there.

I like to spend my down time watching independent films. I also enjoy working out, especially during the summertime. I spend my



Rej Joo is immersed in the social service field benefiting queer youth.

time with my friends, who come from any gender identity, as long as they are somewhat socially conscious, open-minded and definitely laid-back. Every year I make an annual journey to New York City to see my friends. I usually go around late summer.

My proudest moment at work would just be getting this job where I feel privileged to work with youth. With regard to my proudest moment in general, I was given a tortoise by my ex. I have taken very good care of it, despite the fact that I am not such an animal person. I spend lots of time observing it and have learned that it is an intriguing, mysterious animal.

My biggest challenge is my goal of going to medical school. I have lots of work experience in social service, but wanting to transfer that to medicine has left me in a seesaw of self-confidence.

My first job was as a lifeguard. I was 17 years old and worked at the Conestoga Recreation Center.

I get my inspiration from people who are pure at heart, mostly children and those who are grounded in religious or spiritual lifestyles. I feel inspired to create a better life for such pure children. They make me a better person. This is why I love working with them and spending time creating relationships with them.

My last queer event was [attending a] trans clinic meeting. There were lots of doctors and social workers just discussing the needs of trans individuals. [The time] before that, I went to C.C. Slaughters for a dance party. I was celebrating my 24th birthday.

My highest hope for the cause is health care. I want access for intersex and trans individuals. We live in a society that has set up a binary system. One is either male or female, and what health care you receive depends on that. Those who don't fit this description are lost in the cracks. They are discriminated against, and this is why I want to enter the medical field. I just want to be able to help them. ©

—Neethu Ramchandrar

just asking

Just Out asked Q Center visitors, "Who do you consider, an ally in the straight world?"



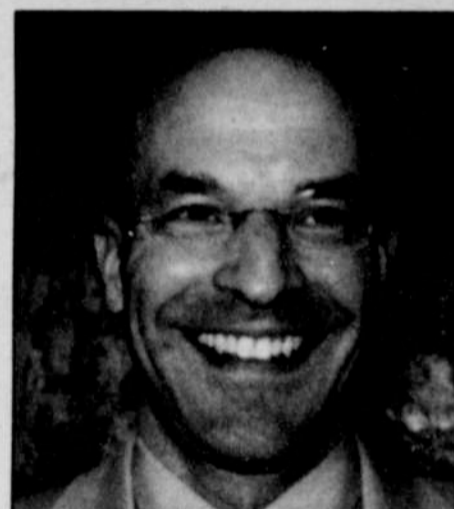
BRIAN HARRIS
Spreader of Happiness

"Judith Light. Ever since *Who's The Boss*, it seems that she and Sharon Stone have done a bunch of events together in Los Angeles. It would be nice to see more men involved. Women seem to have more sympathy and feeling about the disease and the community as a whole."



VALERIE TOBIN
Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner

"Oldie but goodie Gloria Steinem. In all of her work she's been inclusive in [gaining] rights for women that she's sometimes confused as a lesbian herself."



JEFF KNAPP
Tap Dancing Attorney

"Judy Shepard or Betty DeGeneres—people standing up for their kids. Judy Shepard has taken a personal tragedy and turned it into something that has helped a whole group of people, rather than retreating into mourning."



MICHELE MANNIX
Energetic

"Jerry Ray, the director of homeless services for the Massachusetts Mental Health Association, was my mentor in the homeless and mentally ill community. He was very much an advocate for all sorts of people."

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— Charlie's Owners: Rebecca & Craig Anderson, Sandy, Oregon

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