

It took a lot of planning, fundraising, the right people and the right location to inaugurate Portland's Q Center three-plus years ago—and that's exactly what a planning committee in Vancouver is hoping for. Triple Point, a weekly support group program—by way of Children's Home Society of Washington—for LGBTQ youth in Clark County, has been a valuable regional resource to tackle issues like health education and self-advocacy. But in order to implement a sustainable future for the program, the committee applied for and received from the Pride Foundation a Queer Youth Capacity Building Grant. Now the planning committee—led by CHSW staff like Erinn Havig and Spring Dowse—are in the initial stages of making a queer youth center in Vancouver a reality.

"When this group of about 15 community members came together," explains Havig, CHSW program manager for Family Support and Early Learning, "we identified that there are specific needs for queer youth in Clark County and for the agencies that work with these youth."

The active members of the committee include youth, community members and agency professionals from organizations such as Cascade AIDS Project, YWCA of Clark County, Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) of Southwest Washington and more. The committee has also partnered with Clark College's Queer Penguins, as well as with Washington State University Pride groups. The project, as Havig is quick to note, is not a CHSW

endeavor, but rather a community effort.

"The vision is for this center to create a safe and accepting environment for queer youth of Clark County by providing social support, education, leadership opportunities and resources so that youth become confident, caring and capable adults," Havig says. "Current plans are that the center would have partner agencies working together with youth to staff the center and provide agency services as well as increased activities for the youth."

"Throughout this community building process we have seen that a dedicated space for queer youth is something that the local community wholeheartedly supports," says Daniel Schollaert, HIV prevention specialist for CAP in Clark County. "CAP will continue to support this work with the hope of one day opening the doors of the center."

An estimated \$92,000 is needed to operate

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—ERINN HAVIG, CHSW STAFF

the very minimum of the center. This would include a space to accommodate 40 youth comfortably, private offices for counseling and HIV testing, and would also be ADA accessible. A location has yet to be chosen, but Havig says one near the Vancouver Mall is desirable due to the transportation barriers of some youth.

Both WSU and Clark College have already hosted drag shows to benefit the project. Coming up at 8 p.m. Sunday, May 22, PFLAG of Southwest Washington has organized a fundraiser dubbed "A Sweet Fantasy." Held at the Fraternal Order of the Eagles #2158 (107 E. Seventh St., Vancouver), the event features a dessert bar, entertainment, raffles and more with help from the Queer Penguins, Triple Point and The Imperial Sovereign Court of the Raintree Empire (\$5 admission, 503-730-7375 or bgross@teleport.com).

Havig reports that even in its infancy, the

Northern Exposure

Vancouver planning committee eyes queer youth center in Clark County

BY RYAN J. PRADO



Participants in the Clark College Diversity Rally last November

planning committee for a queer youth center in Vancouver has received an amazing donation of time and energy by youth and community members. That momentum, one hopes, will follow through to the realization of the project—providing Vancouver LGBTQ youth with a place to call their own.

"To me, the most important reason to have a center in Vancouver is that if the only safe and queer-identified spaces are in Portland, we send the message to youth that they are not welcome in this town, this community or this state and that they have to go elsewhere to be accepted for who they are," Havig explains, noting that there is no competition whatsoever with Portland's Q Center.

"Our youth are so important and amazing," she continues. "We need to work to better support them in their hometown. Our goal is to create a safe community here as well." ☐

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