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In Neighborhoods

BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Pride in Action

Creating safe spaces and acceptance for LGBTQ youth

BY ANNE STOKES

Many LGBTQ youths are rejected by their families out of love, according to Emily Bender, LGBTQ program coordinator with NorCal Mental Health America.

“The rejecting behaviors, many times are not intended to be cruel or mean,” says Bender. “They do it out of love, they think that it’s what’s best for them, that society would love them if they were straight.”

“IF YOU REDUCE YOUR REJECTION MESSAGES, THERE’S A BETTER CHANCE THAT YOUR CHILD WILL SURVIVE AND TURN OUT TO BE A HEALTHY ADULT.”

Emily Bender, LGBTQ Program Coordinator

Unfortunately, youth who face such rejection are more likely to do drugs, engage in risky behaviors and commit suicide. “If you reduce your rejection messages, there’s a better chance that your child will survive and turn out to be a healthy adult,” she says.

It is that message that Bender wants to get out to the community. Through a grant from The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative, Bender is

working with the BHC’s Pride Action Team to empower adults to establish safe and affirming environments for kids and youth who are, or who are perceived to be, LGBTQ or their allies through outreach, trainings and community events. The team is divided into four subcommittees to address everyday issues that affect the lives of LGBTQ youth: schools and families, faith-based and spiritual organizations, businesses and service providers, and neighborhood safety and transportation.

The Pride Action Team focuses mainly on South Sacramento, an area where LGBTQ youth face an increased amount of aggression, gender-based oppression and verbal harassment compared to other neighborhoods.

“It’s a really diverse community, mostly Southeast Asian, African American and Hispanic, with very few Caucasians, so it’s really a community of color,” explains Bender. “Many times, it’s tough to go into that community and open those doors. That’s why we want to make sure that in this Pride Action Team we include people of color, and that we include groups like La Familia, the Asian Pacific Islander groups, and that we include groups from African American churches and spiritual centers, so we have that vocabulary to talk with these families.”

From working with schools to help them better support Gay-Straight Alliance clubs to showing businesses how to create safe spaces

where youth can be free from harassment and treated with respect, the Action Team works to foster acceptance. They also reach out to law enforcement, nonprofit organizations, churches and families who are struggling to reconcile religious or cultural values with what their children are going through.

“If you want your child to continue living a healthy life, we need to create a climate that is loving and supporting,” Bender says. “It doesn’t mean that you have to wave a rainbow flag and walk at the parades, we’re not asking you to do that. What we’re asking you is please don’t make your child feel like less of a person.”

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

In 2010, The California Endowment launched a 10-year, \$1 billion plan to improve the health of 14 challenged communities across the state. Over the 10 years, residents, community-based organizations and public institutions will work together to address the socioeconomic and environmental challenges contributing to the poor health of their communities.

Pride Action Team members attended a LGBTQ Youth retreat in November where site representatives engaged in networking sessions and idea-sharing meetings aimed at sharing successful projects with other BHC sites across the state. Photo courtesy of NorCal MHA



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Health Happens in Neighborhoods. Health Happens in Schools.
Health Happens with Prevention.

Want to get involved? Attend the next Pride Action Team meeting on Tuesday, Dec. 8 from 9:30 to 11 a.m. at the Mutual Housing at the Greenway, 6311 Sampson Blvd. Sacramento. Can’t attend but still want to get involved? Call 530-366-1777.



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