

## Youth Focus Group

**Facilitated by:** Alicia Nájera, LCSW, MHSA Coordinator and Linda Betts, MHSA Administrative Assistant.

On October 16, 2008 we met with 7 youth, 4 girls and 3 boys that identify as “LGBT,” at the United Way offices in Capitola, CA. Participants were offered pizza and beverages, and at the end of the session were given \$10 voucher cards for their participation.

We provided an overview of MHSA, and specifically described the PEI stakeholder process and the workgroup recommendations, and asked them to provide feedback about their experiences, and their recommendations for PEI.

Each participant shared their views/opinions based on personal experience on what kind of issues they have encountered and what could help LGBT youth.

**Issues/Concerns:** The primary focus of issues encountered centered on their identity of being “LGBT.” Specifically, they spoke of negative reactions from parents to “coming out,” and to being called names or bullied at school. They also touched on other issues, such as being in foster care (“too many rules”), and medication (“that isn’t always the answer; why go there first?”).

### Sources of Support:

- Everyone in the group felt that the Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) offer support and a safe place away from home; they wish that every high school and middle school had a GSA.
- Peer support is particularly important in coping with the “coming out” process, and peers help “keep one sane”.
- Ideally, they would go to their parents when bullied, but not all parents are supportive or understand.
- One participant shared an experience in an exercise called, “What’s in a name?” Provided statistics on suicide and how names can have a negative connotation attached to it and what some of the negative affects they have on people. She found this particularly helpful.

### Recommendations:

- **Education** about the LGBT youth for parents (“can they be understanding, proud and compassionate?”), and educators. Education through various media venues – things people say and the “real” effect it has on kids/LGBT.
- **Counseling services.** They called out counselors needed with training on LGBT issues, peer counselors, counseling for parents of youth who “come out,” and counselors to focus on “self esteem” issues for all students.
- **Support**, such as having someplace safe to go to after “coming out” to parent/s, particularly if it did not go well. Having supportive adults in youth’s life.
- **Outreach & Activities:** Collaboration with other schools; beach bonfires (or other casual settings) where people can gather and share thoughts/ideas. They also talked about having activities that are *family* friendly, visiting senior’s (buddy system) because “they have a lot of knowledge to share,” and dances (that are LGBT friendly).