

SHENANDOAH LGBTQ CENTER NEWS

MAY 2020



from the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Any description I could give of our collective experience over the last six weeks would be filled with clichés and overused words like “unprecedented” or “challenging”. And while

at times it's felt overwhelming, the challenges we have faced have caused us to reflect on the essence of what makes us community while expanding our creative approaches as we continue to support the LGBTQ people of the Shenandoah Valley.

What's become clear is that shared experience is a powerful tool for creating and sustaining communities. In our isolation within our own homes, it is vital that we remember that we are not alone, that we are not the only ones who feel despair, longing, or confusion. Opportunities to connect with others and discuss these shared experiences have taken on increased significance for our community.

Because we serve clients of all ages and backgrounds, we've come to realize that not everyone wants to connect in the same way. Some folks are happy to join a video conference with six or eight other people. Others prefer an email or text message. And others appreciate a phone call just to hear a friendly voice.

We've been doing all of these each week, both answering and initiating phone calls, texts, and emails, holding weekly check-in meetings and keeping up our regularly scheduled groups via video conference. I'm so grateful for our part-time staff that has kept our social media fresh and posted reminders about these opportunities for connection.

We've donned our creative thinking caps as the weeks have dragged on, and we're excited to be offering some new opportunities for connection later this month. We hope you'll enjoy this latest issue of our newsletter and that it will inspire you to join in where you feel joyful as we continue to sustain and encourage our community.

—Emily Sproul

UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN . . .

Many of us are longing to meet up again, enjoy drop in hours or movie night at the Center, and the chance to visit face to face. As the governor continues to monitor developments and make assessments about reopenings, we are talking with other LGBTQ centers around the country about how and when to reopen.

Since our mission is to support the health and wellbeing of our LGBTQ community, we take very seriously our commitment to both mental health and physical health. We understand just how burdensome and dangerous forced isolation can be for the mental health of our community, but we also want to be sure that we are protecting the physical health of our most vulnerable neighbors including those with HIV or other immune disorders, older adults, and those with diabetes, heart conditions, and other risk factors.

The most likely scenario is that we will do a phased reopening of the center, hopefully beginning with support groups and the option to make an appointment with our staff for in-person visits. We are grateful to Kay Shirey of Stelle Rose for donating a “sanitation station” hands-free sanitizer dispenser for our space, and we have also been offered the donation of fabric masks for those that need them while visiting the Center.

We will be sure to keep you updated on our website and through social media as these plans develop.



STAUNTON PRIDE 2020

It was difficult to see April 25 come and go and not be celebrating Staunton Pride in Gypsy Hill Park. We continue to work closely with the City Manager and other city officials to determine whether our rescheduled date of July 25 will be feasible. With the cancellation of America's Birthday Celebration on July 4, we continue to plan for two scenarios - our in-person celebration with appropriate protective measures, or a virtual celebration.

Regardless of which option we ultimately choose, our goal is to bring you all the aspects of Pride that are most important - a sense of community, great drag performances, souvenir merchandise, beautiful and fun items from local vendors, and wonderful local music. Stay tuned to the Pride webpage stauntonpride.org for updates.

JUNE IS PRIDE MONTH!

As Centers and communities the world over are having to postpone or cancel their Pride celebrations in June, InterPride and the European Pride Organisers Association have teamed up to present a [24-hour virtual Global Pride on June 27](https://www.interpride.org/2020/06/24-hour-virtual-global-pride-on-june-27/). According to a press release, the live-streamed event “...will include musical performances, speeches, and key messages from human rights activists,” under the theme Exist.Persist. Resist. We hope you'll join us in celebrating with LGBTQ people around the world!

PEN PALS FOR PRIDE

Since we can't all be together to celebrate Pride month, we are launching a new initiative called Pen Pals for Pride, designed to provide support and encouragement to members of the LGBTQ community from other community members and allies. Participants are asked to send a card or letter to at least one LGBTQ youth, elder, or other community member during the month of June. We encourage recipients to reply and if possible, develop a correspondence relationship with the senders. Not only will we show support for our LGBTQ neighbors, we'll also support the USPS which has been working so hard during the pandemic.



If you would like to participate in the Pen Pals for Pride program, either as a sender or a recipient, please share your information with us by [filling out this form](#). Sign up by June 5 and we will email you further instructions.

PRIDE ORNAMENTS COMING SOON

Beginning June 1, you'll be able to purchase this LIMITED EDITION Pride ornament, handmade by local artist, Sharon Sproul. Sharon has been making paper ornaments like these for decades out of various colors and designs of wrapping paper, using just glue, floss, and a few buttons. The result is a 3-inch diameter starburst ornament, lightweight and ready to hang anywhere.



Sharon has spent hundreds of hours over the last year to make over 300 of these in Pride colors in support of Shenandoah LGBTQ Center. One hundred percent of the proceeds will benefit the Center and help us make up for lost revenue from delayed and cancelled events.

Keep an eye on our website for ordering information so you can have one (or more!) of your very own. Makes a great holiday or anytime gift, too!

SHENANDOAH LGBTQ CENTER MAY NEWS

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT - REACHING VALLEY YOUTH



The initial contact came in the form of an appointment booking through our website. The information was scant – gay, male-identified, wanted help for his “sexual preference”. I emailed him and asked a few basic questions to try to better understand his needs. We set up an appointment to meet at the Center.

The day of his appointment we were already busy with drop-in hours. I had been chatting with a number of visitors when I noticed he had silently arrived and sat down on the couch. This fresh-faced teenager looked a bit lost and I realized immediately this was the appointment I had scheduled. I sat down next to him and introduced myself and the conversation took off. His story poured out at a dizzying pace and I worked hard to mentally note all the details as I asked clarifying questions.

A high schooler in a county school district, his family of origin story was full of trauma. Difficult circumstances led to him living with an extended family member beginning in middle school. Once in high school, another student picked a fight with him about his sexuality. An administrator called his home and outed him to his guardian. The guardian, furious to learn he was gay, threatened him with a knife and threw his belongings out into the yard. After a period of homelessness, he landed with another family

member willing to take him in, but still unaccepting of his sexual identity.

Now with less than a year left in his high school career, his life before the pandemic was already limited to school, work, and home with strict rules from his guardian against hanging out with friends. He felt physically and socially isolated from peers, but at least got to see friends at school. Now that school is canceled indefinitely, he has lost any opportunity to socialize with peers. Without a driver’s license he is dependent on his guardian for transportation. It’s no wonder he feels desperate to escape.

What do we do for youth like this? To start with, we become an “askable adult” - a trusted adult who can answer questions about sexual health without judgement and provide access to information and materials to promote risk mitigation (think condoms, lube, connections to health professionals and trusted websites). We can also encourage these youth to connect with an affirming counselor, and when they’re ready, we provide a referral to our trusted partners. We develop a relationship with them in which we evaluate their readiness to live on their own and help them with resources (job information, housing opportunities, potential roommates, transportation solutions) to make sure that transition is as smooth as possible. And during this pandemic, we text them weekly to check in on how they’re doing and offer support.

He’s only one of countless youth in the Shenandoah Valley living in unsupportive homes, quietly suffering and yearning to be free of the struggles with family members. All the challenges that rural youth already face are magnified by their sexual or gender identity. These youth are the reason we work with school counselors, teachers, and families to make sure that kids like these do have an “askable adult.” Our LGBTQ youth in the Valley need GSAs at their schools. They need a supportive network of people who accept them for who they are and encourage them to live authentically. And they need your support of Shenandoah LGBTQ Center so that we can continue to be a beacon of hope for them. As the anonymous quote says, “We don’t want to turn your straight children gay. We want your gay children to survive.”

DONATE

Like every organization, we are working hard to adapt to changing conditions. This means budgets must adapt as well, accommodating fees for new technology services and other unexpected expenses. It also means that our income from major events has been disrupted with the postponement of Pride and questions about our second annual Gayla. We continue to pay rent for our Center space and office space at the Masonic building, even though we can’t use them at this time. We have a close, positive relationship with the building’s owners, they take good care of us, and we know that they have bills to pay as well. We feel this is the right thing to do in continuing to support our local economy as much as we are able.

The leadership of the Center has been very fiscally responsible with the funds we’ve raised in the 18 months since we started, allowing us a cushion of ten months of operating and payroll expenses. But we still need your help to secure our future and ensure that we can continue to provide resources and support to our LGBTQ community here in the Valley.

If you are in a position to give, please [visit our website](#) today and consider becoming a member of any of our giving clubs. Monthly giving starts at just \$5 per month and makes a big difference in our budget planning. Thank you for whatever you can give to help.



VIRTUAL POTLUCK

Are you missing our monthly potlucks? Getting bored with your quarantine cuisine? Then join us for a VIRTUAL potluck, Sunday, May 17! Visit the Facebook event page and share your recipes ahead of time for creative quarantine meals. We are looking to share recipes that are simple, delicious, economical, and perhaps a twist on something basic. On May 17 at 5 p.m., we will gather virtually via Zoom and enjoy conversation over our separate meals. Hope you’ll join us!

WEEKLY CHECK-INS AND MONTHLY SUPPORT GROUPS

Needing a little support? A chance to connect with others? Join us for our weekly online check-in, every Saturday at 3 p.m. Our monthly peer-to-peer support groups continue to meet virtually as well at their regularly scheduled times. To learn more, or to register for check-ins or support groups, please visit our [website](#).

UPCOMING GAYLA - SAVE THE DATE!

Mark your calendars for our fall Gayla, scheduled for Saturday, October 24 at Stelle Rose. We hope to all be able to celebrate in person, but regardless of how we gather, the Gayla will be an opportunity to celebrate the growth and resilience of the Center while raising the funds we need to continue to expand our vision of how we serve the community.

THE
GAYLA



TRAILHEAD
\$5-24/mo



BASE CAMP
\$25-49/mo



SUMMIT
\$50-\$99/mo

