



Center volunteer fosters community building and awareness



Overcoming divides, building community and fostering understanding are at the core of Courtney Gray's volunteer work.

"One of my biggest goals in my volunteerism is to bring the trans community together, past its internal and agency divides," said Courtney.

Courtney came to The Center looking for community. She started volunteering and getting involved in The Center. She did a number of different volunteer jobs, including working at the front desk. As a volunteer, she saw transgender people coming to The Center looking for advice, resources and direction. The experiences inspired her to take a more active approach.

"Information has to be made available," Courtney says, adding that information providers need training on how to talk to transgender people.

The Center started the Transgender Advisory Committee at the beginning of the year, and Courtney was asked if she would co-chair the committee. The committee offers feedback and programming recommendations to the The Center's board and staff. One such program Courtney helped develop was the Trans Rest Area at this year's Denver PrideFest.

The Trans Rest Area was a place for networking, community-building and developing interagency cooperation. It was hosted by The Center, and staffed with volunteers from the Gender Identity Center of Colorado, TransAction and the larger transgender community. It provided information to visitors about area resources.

The rest area also collected valuable community-related information. A survey developed by the Transgender Law Center in California was also available for visitors to fill out.

"The survey provided them a lot data and a lot of leverage. They were able to go to state and federal government for funding for trans programming," said Courtney.

The rest area had 60 respondents to the survey. Courtney plans on running the survey until PrideFest 2011. The survey, which is designed to collect socioeconomic data on transgender and transsexual people in Colorado, is available at The Center's front desk.

The rest area also acted as a home base for some of the transgender people attending PrideFest. What Courtney was most happy about was that the area was a supportive haven for two transgender people venturing out in public in their identified gender for the first time.

Courtney is also working with The Center to help develop a Transgender Job Fair, scheduled for May 7, 2011. She got the idea after observing a similar job fair in San Francisco this past April. While visiting, she networked with transgender community program managers there and was provided with information on running a job fair.

Courtney says she hopes The Center will become a strong leader in what it means it means to be supportive and inclusive of the transgender community. The Center can help bridge some of the community gaps by bringing more trans-specific programming to the table. The Center can also encourage greater community participation rallies and community promoting awareness of transgender and transsexual needs and concerns, she said.

"We are just like everyone else, and we have the same struggles as everyone else," Courtney said.