

Trans* Youth Forum to take place at Princeton on April 18

By Sarah Gavis-Hughson

For further information, contact Corrine O'Hara, 609-683-5255, x217

PRINCETON, NJ — HiTOPS; The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network Central New Jersey; and the LGBT Center at Princeton University will pioneer a new Trans* Youth Forum on April 18, 2015. The forum will take place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the Frist Campus Center at Princeton University, and is open to trans*, gender queer, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and gender questioning youth ages 11 to 26. (To reflect the diversity of the transgender community, the organizers chose to include the asterisk, which is commonly used to denote the nature of trans* as an umbrella term for those who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth).

Students will come from across the state and beyond. Registrants include youth from Princeton, Jersey City, Ewing, Secaucus, and even upstate New York. While participants are asked to contribute \$15 to cover food costs, the event will be open to all, and no one will be turned away.

The forum will include a light breakfast, a trans* youth panel, three workshop time blocks, and a keynote speech by transqueer poet J Mase III during lunch. Participants will have a choice of a variety of workshops during each time slot, broadly classified into the categories of Health and Wellness; Community, Arts and Expression; Sex, Dating and Relationships; and Coming out, Being Out, Being Stealth.

“We had way more proposals than we could take at this event,” said Sarah Stout, co-organizer and a social work intern at HiTOPS.

“It was exciting to see an outpouring of interest like that. I think the challenge is in accommodating everybody ... You want to be as inclusive as possible, and you want to provide a good program that has a lot of content and diverse voices.”

The trans* youth panel will feature a diverse group of trans*, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming young adults, including Tyler Davies, who identifies as a trans man as well as a Christian and a person of color. “I wanted to talk about my story as far as my parents go and the difficulty that I have dealt with as far as homelessness and the religious beliefs of my parents, because they’re both evangelical ministers ... (and) how that affected me as a trans person,” Davies said. “I hope that (Forum participants) can see not only the difference in trans identities but the difference of lives and how we don’t all have the same exact life or the same exact story, as much as it’s portrayed in the media ... I want them to see that there are different ways or different times that we all figured out who we were.”



J Mase III

Another focus of the day is providing information to trans* youth. The forum will feature resource tables from organizations including the Mazzoni Center, The Institute for Personal Growth, GLSEN Central NJ, HiTOPS, Hetrick Martin, Gender Spectrums Support Network, and the African American Office of Gay Concerns.

Mazzoni Center case management supervisor Kate Gormley (who uses the gender-neutral pronoun they) and their coworkers will run one of these resources tables, as well as presenting two workshops at the forum. “I think the focus for me is empowering young people to be that advocate for themselves. A lot of times, folks don’t think that someone under the age of 18 doesn’t have the capacity to make this decision (to transition), and it’s wrong,” Gormley said. “There’s nothing magic that happens on someone’s 18th birthday. So really empowering youth to think critically about what they’re looking for, and helping connect them to that, and giving them the tools to make these decisions and have these conversations—with either therapists or medical providers or family members—in a way that feels good for them.”

Co-organizer Corrine O’Hara, the LGBTQ coordinator at HiTOPS, said a main focus of the forum is providing these resources. “I’m doing it mostly because there’s such a lack of resources and information out there, and I’ve heard that directly from trans youth,” said O’Hara. “Gender’s a big issue; it’s something to be talked about, something to be celebrated, something to explore.”

Davies agreed that the forum is important because of the scarcity of resources for trans* youth, and especially for poor youth, in New Jersey. “I’d love to see more of this because I don’t think that New Jersey has enough for trans youth,” he said.

At the end of the day, the forum is about making connections. “Affirmation and a sense of, you can do this, you can be who you want to be in this world,” Stout said. “I really hope that that is something that people walk away with, and also that they’re not alone in any of it, that not only are there other trans folks out there ... but that there are adults and organizations and service providers and experts who are out there willing to help.”

About the co-sponsors:

HiTOPS is the only health education center focusing exclusively on youth in New Jersey. Founded by nurse practitioners and health educators, HiTOPS’ collective expertise is in providing prevention and risk reduction education to adolescents and young adults. HiTOPS has 27 years of experience implementing a public health approach for teaching age-appropriate knowledge and skills for youth to make healthy decisions and avoid high risk behavior. For more information, visit <http://www.hitops.org> or contact corrine@hitops.org.

The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network strives to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. GLSEN Central New Jersey serves the central portion of New Jersey. Having a population of 3.21 million residents, these seven counties include Burlington, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean and Somerset. For more information, visit <http://glsen.org/chapters/centralnj> or contact nj@njglsen.org.

Princeton University's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Center is by, for, and about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, asexual, and ally members of the Princeton University community. The LGBT Center works to create a safe and supportive academic environment through educational opportunities and advocating for the needs and concerns of LGBTQA students. For more information, visit <http://www.princeton.edu/lgbt/> or contact acofino@princeton.edu.

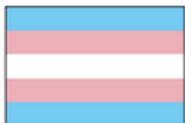
Definitions of some trans* terms (adapted from Seth Jamison Rainess for the Asbury Park Press):

Transgender: A transgender person's internal gender identity does not match their body's biological sex (or what some may refer to as “assigned at birth” sex). “Transgender” may be used as an individual identity for someone who wishes to transition their gender socially and/or physically, but is sometimes also used as an umbrella term that encompasses those who desire physical transition (“transsexual” people) and other gender nonconforming (GNC) people, such as genderfluid and genderqueer people or cross-dressers.

Gender Identity: Gender identity is an inner sense of being female, male, neither, or both. By the age of 3, children often have a clear sense of either being male or female. Most the time their identity conforms to their biological sex; whether this is the case or the child is transgender, society instills in them rules about how one should conform to their birth sex.

Gender expression: Gender expression is the presentation of self to others as masculine, feminine, both, or neither. Some of expression's aspects include mannerisms or movement, dressing and grooming, and possibly certain behaviors or interests. Unfortunately, children whose gender expressions do not meet with what society feels they should be are usually mistreated. Children learn quickly how to try to fit in. However, gender nonconforming (GNC) children will likely continue to act and behave in accordance with their interests despite these attempts, and despite the consequences of running counter to what is expected of them.

Genderfluid, Genderqueer, or Nonbinary: Genderfluid, genderqueer, and nonbinary people internally understand their gender identity as falling outside the binary construct of “male” and “female.” They may feel, and perhaps struggle to convey to others, that their gender is a mix of both, varies from day to day, is neither or beyond, or something else entirely. They may request that others refer to them with gender-neutral pronouns such as “they.”



Transgender



Genderqueer



Gender Neutral



Genderfluid