

## ACLA UPDATE

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# FALL 1999

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### ◀ SCHOOL VIOLENCE - THROUGH A DIFFERENT LENS ▶

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One May morning, as I dropped my 15 year old daughter off at Edward little High School, I commented on the fact that the police cruiser parked outside of the school was becoming somewhat of a regular addition to the school. As she grabbed her backpack and headed out, she remarked, "Oh, you probably haven't heard. There was another school shooting yesterday. That's probably why he's here." My stomach did a leap as I watched her head toward the building, past the police cruiser, to begin another day at school.

Whenever I hear about another school shooting, I react on three distinct levels: as a parent of a high school student, as a concerned adult who cares about young people, and as the coordinator of two programs serving gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) youth. Being involved with GLBTQ youth through Outright/Lewiston-Auburn and the Safe Schools Project gives me a very different lens from which to view incidents of violence in our nation's

schools.

After each school shooting everyone seems to be asking the same questions:

- ♦ What would make young people do something like this?
- ♦ Who's to blame for the increase in youth violence?

What can we do about it? These questions are too complex to discuss fully in this short space. And I certainly do not claim to have the answers to any of them. What I do want to offer is a reflection on violence in our schools from the point of view of GLBTQ communities. Three ideas in particular come to mind...

- ♦ Schools have *never* been safe places for GLBTQ students
- ♦ Verbal harassment is often a precursor to physical violence
- ♦ Respect for *all* differences must be valued in our schools and our communities.

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## Through a Different Lens cont.

One of the most compelling commentaries I have read since the Littleton, Colorado shooting came from Dan Savage, in his essay entitled, "Fear the Geek." Savage makes the point that *schools have never been safe places for LGBTQ students*. Savage writes, "In high school, I had much more to worry about than tests and papers. Like most students, I lived in fear of the small slights and public humiliations used to reinforce the rigid high school caste system: poor girls were sluts, soft boys were fags. And at each of my schools, there were students who lived in daily fear of physical violence." Savage points out that most GLBTQ youth are more likely than heterosexual youth to use alcohol and other drugs, smoke cigarettes, practice unsafe sex, and attempt suicide. Doesn't it make sense, says Savage, that a small percentage of those young people who are constantly tormented by others will turn their feelings outward rather than inward. The responsibility for school violence, he says, rests not only with those who commit the acts, but also with those who create an abusive climate in schools. He writes, "The culpability of the other kids at Columbine has been glossed over. So long as some kids go out of their way to make

**I could fill a book with the stories I've heard in my three years with ACLA. Most often the stories involve verbal harassment and public humiliation; sometimes physical violence ensues.**

high school hell for others, there are going to be kids who crack, and not all of the kids who crack are going to (do it) quietly off by themselves." Savage's message is a wake up call to all of us who are unaware of what high school is really like for many students.

What is high school, or middle school for that matter, really like for GLBTQ students? I could fill a book with the stories I've heard in my three years with ACLA. There is the boy who dreads gym class because each class period, during their mandatory run, one or two other boys run by him each lap around the gym and whisper anti-gay remarks into his ear. I remember the parent who once told me that all boys in the music program at his son's school are targets of anti-gay harassment. He said, "I can't imagine that there is *any* boy at that school who hasn't been called a fag." Most often the stories involve verbal harassment and public humiliation; sometimes physical violence ensues.

What is clear, from the many stories I've heard and from reports of civil rights violations from the State Attorney General's office, is that physical violence is usually preceded by weeks and months of verbal ha-

arrassment. I think we need to ask why this is so, *especially* in light of the recent school shootings.

What all of this boils down to, for me, is that we must learn to respect differences. This is not really a matter of choice; it is a matter of survival. For ourselves as a society, and for our children, in a very real, very concrete, very immediate way. Students who are constantly harassed, for whatever reason, will search for ways to deal with the feelings of shame and isolation that result. They may numb the pain with alcohol or other drugs, or they may lash out and try to inflict pain on their harassers. And students who verbally harass fellow students do not benefit from having adults look the other way. By allowing students to verbally harass others, we are sending them the message that it is acceptable to pick on people who are different. All of us, young and old alike, need to create a world in which differences are celebrated rather than reviled.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth have a lot to teach us about diversity and about learning to live with people who are different. When we're looking for answers to the problem of school violence, why not ask GLBTQ youth? After all, they deal with harassment, in one form or another, nearly every day of their lives.

— Nancy Bullett

**GLBTQ youth can teach us a lot about diversity!**

**For more information  
about Outright / L-A, or  
the Safe Schools Project  
call Nancy at 786-4697**







## And then there was the Phoenix Project...

In January of this year, ACLA's MSM HIV prevention program, serving men who have sex with men, culminated months of planning by bringing into existence the **Phoenix Project**. The new program is a response to changes in the AIDS epidemic, new prevention research, growing recognition that rural men experience the epidemic very differently from their urban counterparts, and most importantly, **the opinions of local gay and bisexual men about the future direction of HIV prevention.**

The Phoenix Project **meets men where they're at** by listening to and supporting the decisions they make as well as going to the places where they are the most comfortable. The Phoenix Project emphasizes working with men one-on-one and works to enhance trust and rapport, which are absolutely necessary for effective HIV prevention. The Phoenix Project emphasizes risk management and harm reduction rather than repeating a list of "do's and don'ts."

By listening to the needs of local men, the Phoenix Project is expanding the very notion of HIV prevention for gay and bisexual men. Twenty years into the epidemic, it is a welcome change.

The Phoenix Project is already meeting with some success:

- For years, men have spoken with Sean directly or called the office looking for a support group serving adult gay and bisexual men. Other service providers have also called, hoping to refer their clients to a support group. Thanks to an exciting collaboration between ACLA's Phoenix Project and Tri County Mental Health Services, the Gay Men's Support Group began monthly meetings in July. ACLA is seeking foundation

funding to expand the program.

- The Phoenix Project continues to provide condoms and information about HIV and STD in several bars in Androscoggin County.
- Whereas the focus of the MSM project was in Lewiston-Auburn and occasionally in other venues around Androscoggin County, The Phoenix Project is beginning to establish itself throughout Androscoggin and Oxford Counties.
- The Phoenix Project sponsors REEL Men, monthly movie nights/socials for gay and bisexual men of all ages.
- The number of men seeking one-on-one support for HIV prevention has more than doubled in the past year.
  - A three-week workshop series, Safe Men, focuses on affirming, holistic and empowering HIV prevention messages.
  - As the word gets out about the Phoenix Project, more men are calling looking for support, information, and referrals. ACLA recently received United Way Venture Grant funding to begin to fill the information gap.



The Carpenters may have said it best when they sang, "We've only just begun..." There is a lot of enthusiasm around this project and its potential to make long-lasting changes for gay and bisexual men in Androscoggin and Oxford Counties.

— Sean Douglas

For more information about the Phoenix Project  
or to learn how to become involved:  
Contact Sean at 786-4697 or [acla@gwi.net](mailto:acla@gwi.net)

THE PHOENIX PROJECT / ACLA  
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## catching up . . .

It's been a while since you heard from us, so we thought we'd "catch you up" on ACLA news. **The ACLA Update, after a months long absence, will now appear in your mailbox as a quarterly publication.** ••• At a spring retreat, ACLA board and staff members met to review our mission and to renew our **commitment to AIDS prevention.** ••• St. Mary's Regional Medical Center, **a local agency, is now providing AIDS Case Management services** in Androscoggin and Oxford counties. SMRMC hired Sonia Nadeau as case manager in early winter; we've heard very good things about her from folks we know who are living with HIV. **ACLA has donated \$1000 to a client disbursement fund in SMRMC's AIDS Case Management Program.** ••• We are putting together a proposal for a **street outreach program** to begin in early 2000. Some of you may remember Willy Willette, who did HIV prevention street outreach in Lewiston when he worked for The AIDS Project. Since his departure, New Beginnings has provided the only consistent street outreach program locally - working together we can increase the effectiveness of the work we all do. This will also dovetail nicely with Nancy's work at Androscoggin County Jail. ••• The **United Way has approved our application to become a member agency** and has also **awarded ACLA a small grant for the Diversity Project** (see "And then there was the Phoenix Project, page 3). ••• There's been a lot of talk about the end of the AIDS epidemic in the mainstream media. Perhaps because of this, many AIDS Service Organizations in Maine and the U. S. found it more difficult to raise money in 1998. ACLA did too, and found ourselves making some hard decisions at the end of the year. We decided to eliminate the fundraising staff position. This meant having to say **goodbye to Gracia**, a hard thing for our small and close-knit group, **but she has joined ACLA's Board of Directors** (see: "Gracia" below). We've also cut expenses in other ways, including printing and postage and administrative hours (Claire's vegetable garden is bigger this summer). On a more positive note, thanks to the foundation Gracia laid, we are creating a solid financial development plan to carry us through the year 2000. Two wonderful women with a great deal of development experience between them are donating their time to work with us on this. ••• **We are planning to move!** ACLA has its eye on space in a building on Lisbon St., and may be moving as early as November 1. Thanks to a generous donor who has offered to pay the rent for Outright for one year, **Outright L/A will have its own meeting/library space** in this building, something Outright youth have been lobbying for. Other organizations doing like-minded work are located in the new building, and a number of social service agencies are nearby. The move would also put us within easier walking distance of the downtown neighborhood. If you want to help us move, call Claire at 786-4697.

GRACIA 

Dear Friends,

On May 3rd, I stopped being a member of the staff of the AIDS Coalition of Lewiston-Auburn.

Working for ACLA has been one of the best work situations I have ever experienced. Claire, Sean, Nancy and I are very different from one another, and we acknowledged and honored those differences — a true expression of this organization's commitment to celebrating diversity. We've also had a lot of fun together while working on challenging and often discouraging work. It's been great.

I could not leave ACLA completely behind, so I have joined the Board of Directors, and am looking forward to continued involvement with ACLA's work. I plan to be part of ACLA for a long time to come.

Love, Gracia



**Outright Drop in Group**  
Every Friday Night 6 to 8:30PM  
for more information call  
786-2717

**Reel Men**  
2nd Thursday of Every Month  
7 to 10 PM  
FMI call Sean 786-4697

From the new  
Kid on the  
block!

Hello! Let me introduce myself. My name is Helen Crockett, and I am an Art Major at USM. I am fortunate enough to have a position here at ACLA through the college work study program (and a few good friends). Besides working on this newsletter (which we plan to produce quarterly), I'm creating new brochures for ACLA, arranging displays of artwork for the 'CHILDREN REACHING OUT' program, and helping out with other office duties. It is my great pleasure to be able to work with such a wonderful agency as ACLA, and people like Claire, Nancy, and Sean.

**Men's Support Group**  
Third Thursday of Every Month  
6:30 to 8 PM  
FMI call Sean 786-4697

**Outright Advisor Training**  
(two weekends)  
Friday Oct. 22: 6 pm - 9 pm  
Saturday Oct. 23: 9 am - 5 pm  
Friday Nov. 12: 6 pm - 9 pm  
Saturday Nov. 13: 9 am - 5 pm



ACLA Board Meeting: Second Friday of the month, 8:30 -10 am.  
Outright Steering Committee Meeting: September 13, 6:30 - 8:00  
Outright Steering Committee Workshop: October 16, 8:30 - 11:30 am

**SAFEMEN WORKSHOPS**  
WORKSHOP I: Thursday, September 23  
WORKSHOP II: Thursday, September 30  
WORKSHOP III: Thursday, October 7  
FMI: call Sean @ 786-4697



**Visit us at the Agency Fair**  
Wednesday, September 22  
5 pm - 7 pm at the Multipurpose Center

**OUTRIGHT/Lewiston-Auburn**

Drop-in group for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning young people age 22 and under meets every Friday.

If you're a youth who wants more info  
call OUTRIGHT at 786-2717.

If you're an adult who wants to learn  
more about becoming an advisor  
call Sean at 786-4697.

*wild flowers and a bit of thistle*

A little over a year ago, people gathered for a reunion in Colorado. After more than two decades of struggle, they were celebrating the shut down of Rocky Flats, a plant that manufactured plutonium "triggers" for nuclear weapons. I missed the reunion, but drove to the former plant site with my family when we went to Colorado for our family vacation last October.

Rocky Flats is located in a flat, desert-and-scrub area this side of the Rocky Mountains. When I stepped out of the car, I saw the tracks where we used to block trains, felt the familiar wind blow at my hair and my clothes. I picked some dry wildflowers, a bit of thistle. I thought about all the people who worked to close that plant down, some living at the Flats for months at a time, many spending days, weeks, or months in jail or prison. And I remembered how good I thought it would feel if we actually succeeded.

Now I stood there in the wind, the bit of thistle in my hand, and thought, "sometimes you win." Because we did "win." Rocky Flats no longer produces plutonium triggers.

But the plant is still off-limits. The desert has barbed wire around it. It will take decades and more to clean up the radioactive waste. The stockpiles of nuclear weapons have not disappeared. The young jail guard who lived downwind of the plant and its emissions will never get her daughter back.

"Winning" is a complex thing. And when I see articles like the one I saw recently in the Sun Journal (Maine AIDS Fading, page 1, August 3), I have to wonder what it means. The article cites decreasing numbers of AIDS diagnoses and decreasing numbers of deaths from AIDS in the past three years. And it paints a relatively comforting picture of a "normal" life with HIV.

On one level, the article is describing the real world. There is a glimmer of hope. It is true that for the past three years the number of people newly diagnosed with AIDS in Maine has been decreasing. And it is true that for the past three years the number of people dying from AIDS in Maine has been decreasing.

It is less clear that the number of people newly infected with HIV is decreasing. At most, the data tells us, we can be cautiously optimistic that some prevention efforts are beginning to work. It's not time yet to rest on our laurels. HIV risk is a complex problem, woven into the fabric of the culture. Effective HIV prevention programs must take into account personal, interpersonal and social/cultural dynamics. AIDS is over only when the virus disappears (it hasn't) or when each person believes s/he has a right to live, knows how to protect her/himself, and has the power over her/his body and life to do that.

Thanks to new medications, many people in the U. S. are living longer with HIV and AIDS and experiencing a better quality of life. But it isn't always (or even often) as "normal" a life much of the mainstream press would have us believe. I don't know about you, but I have trouble keeping my vitamins sorted out. Those 30 pills mentioned in the Sun-Journal must be taken on a schedule that is sometimes so mindboggling you need a computer to keep track of it. The drug combinations must be changed often to stay ahead of an ever-mutating virus. And then there are the unintended ("side") effects, some of them disfiguring, some life-threatening. The new drug therapies don't work for everyone. They don't even work for everyone who can afford them.



The Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant is now in the "clean up" phase. Maybe some folks want to think we're in the "clean up" phase with AIDS. Just tidy up a few odds and ends, care for the folks who were unlucky enough to be infected, remind young people not to have sex. Nothing major. In the meantime:

- A young woman's boyfriend has told her that if she doesn't have sex with him, he'll break up with her. She doesn't want to break up. She says he's the best thing that ever happened to her. What are the odds that she'll continue to say no? What are the odds that if they have sex, it will be protected sex?
- A mailing from Mothers' Voices crosses my desk. In a plea for parents to talk with and listen to their children, they say the HIV infection rate among adolescents has doubled in the last three years.
- A friend of mine in rural Maine buys his medications through a mail order company and receives them in an unmarked brown wrapper. As far as I know, no one in his hometown knows yet that he has HIV.
- An AP article on page 5 of the Lewiston Sun Journal (August 30) tells us that HIV complacency is increasing infection risks.
- Someone tells me: "In the past several years no one I know has died of AIDS, and I've had the strange feeling of waiting for the other shoe to drop. It felt too good to be true. Now I may be hearing the sound of the other shoe dropping. I've been visiting people in the hospital again. Someone I know is dying."

It's nice to think the hard stuff is over. If this is about winning and losing, it's nice to think we've won. But a few dried wildflowers and a bit of thistle from the Colorado flatlands pinned to the bulletin board above my desk whispers otherwise. Have we "won?" Is AIDS "fading" from our lives? Or is it, like any familiar visitor, simply fading from many people's awareness?

### **Officials: HIV complacency increasing infection risks**

ATLANTA (AP) - There is a growing complacency about HIV, especially among some people most at risk, health officials said Sunday at the first ever national conference addressing efforts to monitor and prevent the spread of the virus.

More than 2,000 scientists, doctors, researchers and advocates are in Atlanta this week for the National HIV Prevention Conference organized by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and 17 other sponsoring organizations.

"It's becoming increasingly difficult to get people to pay attention to HIV prevention and that in and of itself is a primary reason for this conference," said Dr. Helene Gayle, director of the CDC's National Center for HIV, STD, and TB Prevention. "Despite a growing complacency about the need for HIV prevention, HIV remains a serious disease that is still very much with us and there is a greater need for HIV prevention today more than ever," she said.

During the four-day conference, federal officials will release the latest national data on trends in HIV and AIDS deaths and infection rates for the general population. Statistics on prisoners, unrecognized factors contributing to the spread of HIV, and results from a new HIV test will also be released. (Sun Journal 8/30/99)

*My address has changed to:*

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*Please take my name off ACLA's mailing list:*

*Please add this name to ACLA's mailing list:*

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*Enclosed please find my gift of  
\$\_\_\_\_\_ to further the  
work of the AIDS Coalition*

*Please send me a volunteer application:*

*Name:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Address:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*E-mail:* \_\_\_\_\_

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**ACLA UPDATE: FALL 1999**



"It is not our differences that divide us.  
It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."

--Audre Lorde