



FamilyService

Celebrating And Growing With Families And Our Community Since 1910

Dec. 29th, 2009

Re: Proud Theater

To Whom It May Concern:

I am honored to share my experience with and express my recommendations for Proud Theater. As a former high school English and drama teacher, I encountered many young people over the years that struggled with their sexual identity and all that that can encompass: peer harassment, family rejection, religious and community ostracization, self-loathing, depression, substance abuse, suicide, other self-harm and possibly most damaging: self-rejection. For many of these marginalized teens, the tide of negatives could swallow them whole. They needed *something* positive in their lives. Our small town drama club attracted many of these excluded students, and eventually emerged as the school's first GSA. The group created one of the first "safe spaces" for many of these young teens. Being able to be themselves, create a production *and* make friends was more life-affirming than many had ever experienced. I was lucky to have worked with these amazing, brave, talented kids.

It was with this distant backdrop, I sat to watch a presentation this past fall by Proud Theater at the agency for which I now work; I had left teaching to pursue my favorite aspect of teaching: being a counselor to teens and families (different from a school counselor). The program we operate is for children ages 11-14 who have been struggling at home, school or both whom suffer behavioral/ emotional issues. Within the first seconds of the performance, it became profoundly clear to me what Proud Theater was for the actors: it was not only a safe space, one in which to create theater, it was rich soil, from which these beautiful spirits could bloom- they were creating paintings before our eyes- ones of pain, rejection, strength, overcoming tyranny, self-loathing, self-acceptance, courage, support- all building to a crescendo nothing short of astonishing: a monologue that moved me and others in the room to tears. For these young people to have carried such a burden in their young lives to be willing to throw off that cloak and find the courage to enact their stories was wholly inspiring... in mind, body and soul. And the theater was excellent as well! I felt absorbed on every level and was left feeling ready to march in the streets. I wanted to thank them, hug them, apologize to them, defend them, protect them, cry.

Throughout the performance, the repeated thought in my mind was what a truly amazing, organic body this group really was... and rare! As mental health practitioners, finding LGBTQ resources for young teens and teens is extremely difficult. And finding one with a creative emphasis is impossible! Until now. I promptly referred a family to enroll their child in Proud, which they did. Finding a positive, respectful, productive group was nothing short of a miracle. Prior to Proud, most kids suffer *years* of often total disenfranchisement, especially from their peer group. Not only does Proud Theater move to create solidarity and safety for these young people, it bravely *expresses* their reality outwardly to the world. The profundity of this cannot be overemphasized: for any societal evolution to occur, it will take groups like Proud Theater blazing the trail to ensure a safer, more just world for future generations. A world based in violence, hate, intolerance and ignorance has no place in civilized society. I deeply believe it is organizations like Proud Theater, and the important work they are doing, that will be critical for humanity to advance to our highest potential. Proud Theater is providing some kids a safe space *today*, and most importantly *will* continue to do so in the future with the nurturance and support it requires and deserves. If justice is a war, then these actors are our soldiers.

Most sincerely,

Amy Ginko

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