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Kentucky GSAs Come Together

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Last month [1]*, Arkansas and Kentucky became the 34th and 35th members to join the National Association of GSA Networks* [2]*. This in-depth profile takes a closer look at the National Association?s 35th member, Louisville Youth Group* [3] *in Louisville, Kentucky.*

Twenty-two years ago, Louisville youth Natalie Reteneller attended Louisville Youth Group?s Holiday Social. Her and her boyfriend had just broken up because they came out to each other as gay and lesbian, and Reteneller was trying to meet cute girls.

The 1990 Holiday Social was Louisville Youth Group?s (LYG) first event, making it one of the first safe spaces for LGBTQ youth in Louisville, Kentucky. Reteneller, who later became LYG?s first Executive Director, recalls that there were only 8 people at the small gathering. Reteneller recently told that story to a full crowd at LYG?s 21st anniversary, where Donald Taylor, LYG?s current Executive Director, is in the process of re-building LYG to its full potential.

LYG is adding many new programs with a special focus on GSAs. Last year, LYG brought together community partners from the Louisville metropolitan area and learned that many schools already have a GSA. **LYG is now working in coalition with organizations in the area to offer more resources and programming to those GSA activists.**

Last year, LYG hosted their first GSA Conference [4], with 90 people in attendance. This year, LYG plans to host the ?youth track? for high school and middle school students at Come Together Kentucky [http://louisville.edu/lgbt/news-and-events/come-together-kentucky-2012.ics] [5] , a statewide LGBTQ conference. These steps are just the beginning.

?Every school that wants a GSA should have one,? Taylor stated. Taylor and LYG are well on their way to doing that, though they do face significant challenges.

?We are in the bible belt in a very conservative state,? said Taylor, who was born and raised in Louisville. ?LYG has managed to thrive and live despite that.?

?We have a lot of parents who are afraid and not supportive of their students attending a GSA or LYG,? Taylor explained. ?We have youth who come to LYG who know that if they came out to their parents as going to LYG, then they would get kicked out. There is the perception that if a student goes to a GSA, they must identify as LGBTQ.?

In facing those challenges, Louisville Youth Group is looking forward to drawing knowledge and experience from the other 34 members of the National Association of GSA Networks. ?GSA Network and the National Association will give us propulsion and power moving forward,? explained Taylor. ?From youth to our board, we will be able to tap into lessons learned from GSA Network and other networks across the National Association.?

Louisville Youth Group is growing the GSA movement in Kentucky and we are excited to have them as the 35th member of the National Association of GSA Networks.

To learn more about Louisville Youth Group, visit: http://www.louisvilleyouthgroup.com [3]

To learn more about the National Association of GSA Networks, visit: *http://www.gsanetwork.org/get-involved/change-nation/national-association-gsa-networks* [2]

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