



Helping youth in a big way

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It's been said time and again: "Children are our future." Apparently, someone forgot to mention that LGBT youth aren't part of that equation.

Fighting for help for LGBT teens and young adults is a constant uphill battle, especially when it comes to things like protection in schools and securing federal funding for programs that help them thrive in a world that's already tough enough without the added obstacle of social exclusion or ridicule for one's sexual orientation.

Luckily, there are always advocates - albeit few and far between - who tirelessly fight for those youth, even when the prospects for advancing look bleak.

Take, for instance, the Ruth Ellis Center, who just this past Tuesday was awarded \$366,600 to continue their efforts to help LGBT youth in southeastern Michigan. **Facing federal cuts last year, Executive Director Grace McClelland fought hard to keep the center's programs alive and well, and succeeded with the help of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and Michigan Senators Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow.** We applaud both the center for its continuous efforts and the Senators for stepping up in Washington to make sure that this oft-forgotten segment of the population of homeless youth has resources available to them. Not even close to every LGBT battle has been won or even fought with full force in Washington, but helping youth and making them into adults who are proud of themselves and willing to speak up is a good start.

Then there are smaller, more local efforts to help LGBT youth. Though not as nationally recognized they're equally important toward supporting children and young adults who otherwise might become an awful statistic: For example, the 72 percent of Michigan LGBT youth who feel unsafe at school, or the 30 percent of adolescent suicides completed by LGBT youth.

For some, help can be found at school in the form of Gay Straight Alliances and LGBT centers. Although many are met with opposition from school boards, local governments, parents and school officials, GSAs are popping up all over the nation. Likewise, schools are beginning to recognize the need for support centers targeted specifically at LGBT youth and young adults. University of Michigan-Flint's Ellen Bommarito LGBT Center, for example, does just that.

Moreover, groups like the Triangle Foundation, Affirmations. Michigan Equality and the Safe Schools Coalition help to support the aforementioned efforts and punctuate them with legal endeavors, such as the anti-bullying bill currently on the table in Michigan legislature.

However, when it comes down to it, support is still most needed at the personal level from members and allies of the LGBT community. Whether it's a monetary donation, volunteering, protesting or writing a letter to congress, support for LGBT youth starts with adults who remember what it was like to either have that support or grow up without it. As McClelland of the Ruth Ellis Center has pointed out, support from the community "helps in a very big way" to keep these programs going and growing.