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LOCAL NEWS

Queer College Fair at The Center

by Kim Burgess

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In an effort to help queer youth achieve their career goals, the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Community Center of Utah hosted a college fair Oct. 29. The University of Utah, Weber State University, Salt Lake Community College and Westminster College recruiters each offered a short presentation about their school's atmosphere, majors and resources for queer students. Financial aid and scholarships information was also presented from UtahMentor.org.

The idea for the fair came about through discussions between Center youth director Stan Burnett, University of Utah LGBT Resource Center program coordinator Charles Milne, and Univ. of Utah admissions counselor and diversity programs coordinator Kellie Foreman.

Plans are in the works to hold a second, larger fair in April, which will also include Utah State University, Utah Valley State College and Job Corps. That fair will also broaden to target anyone interested in college and career information, including adults who have been out of school for years. The Center is considering holding two college fairs annually.

Already the October fair appears to have made a difference. "One of the students said he sounded like he was at a Come to Jesus meeting," Foreman said. "I thought, wow. That means this is the right time for him. That means that his mind was open to receive this information."

Burnett felt that an important part of the fair was creating a comfortable atmosphere for queer kids. "The students know that no question around GLBT issues will go unanswered," he said. "It's a good thing for queer youth to spend time in an environment that is accepting and to see that there are adults who want to help them succeed."

In addition, the college recruiters were able to make connections with queer youth. Many college recruiters are planning on becoming high school counselors, Foreman said, and the fair provided a means to begin a dialog with queer youth. Foreman feels that this dialog could help queer teens receive more support in high school. "In the schools, it's very difficult for students who are being harassed as queer to take it to their counselors and get the help they need. They can't address sexual orientation."

As an out lesbian, Foreman is doing her part to increase the visibility of queers in higher education. She often wears Pride jewelry during recruitment trips to high schools; and at a recent visit to a Utah Valley high school, a girl approached her and asked about the jewelry, saying she wanted some. "It makes a difference," Foreman said. "Since I've been at the school [University of Utah], I've had a lot of people say that there is a lesbian in this office who can help you. That's happened a lot."

To receive information on college planning, call the University of Utah recruitment office at 581-8761 or 1-800-685-8856.

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