

In 1991, twenty-two years after the Stonewall Riots, a group of LGBTQ+ community members and their allies gathered together address struggles and obstacles facing LGBTQ+ youth in Olympia. Several students from The Evergreen State College were at the core of this organizing effort.

Based on research and their own personal experiences, organizers understood that the current situation was a public health crisis: LGBTQ+ youth experienced a high rate of bullying, violence, homelessness, suicide ideation and suicide, isolation, discrimination, domestic violence, substance abuse, unaddressed mental health struggles, vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, and immense struggles at home, at school, at work, and in the community. They knew that many LGBTQ+ youth had little access to support and were not able to come out to anyone for fear of negative outcomes.

The first action taken by the group of community members was to start a weekly peer support group for LGBTQ youth, which continues to meet today.

The organizers named the newly formed group Stonewall Youth to honor the fierce activism of those involved in the Stonewall Uprising and as a commitment to continue with the fight for justice and the rights of all people to live lives free of oppression.

Demand for its services grew quickly, and organizers incorporated Stonewall Youth as a Washington State Nonprofit in June of 1993 and received 501(c)3 status by IRS in the following year.

Within its first several years, the organization had instituted these programs, almost all of which continue today:

- The **weekly peer support group**.
- **Drop-in** hours for youth to hang out with each other and adult mentors.
- A **Speakers Bureau** of youth and adults who spoke at schools, agencies, organizations, and other community venues about the needs and experiences of LGBTQ+ youth.
- A **hotline** available to youth to speak to adult volunteers and staff members about their struggles and to find out about Stonewall programs. *The hotline was eventually phased out after Stonewall Youth assisted Olympia's Crisis Clinic hotline to incorporate LGBTQ+ training for staff and to create a hotline for youth.*
- **Safe and sober social activities** for youth, such as dances and game nights.
- **Health Education** regarding safer sex, consent, HIV/AIDS, and other important issues.
- **Referrals and advocacy** for youth facing a wide variety of struggles.



The Struggle Continues

For a brief period of time during the Stonewall Uprising in 1969, a dazzlingly diverse array of people rose up together to fight for their individual and collective rights, in spite of race, gender, class, and generational differences. *That has not been the case in the decades since the riot.* Racism, white supremacy, misogyny, ableism, classism, ageism, adultism and other types of oppression have increased the marginalization, exclusion, danger, and struggles faced by many LGBTQ+ people within queer communities and in the wider culture.