Small Works for Big Change

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SILENT AUCTION & PERFORMANCES
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TRANS/ACTION PHANTOM: EXCHANGE & CIRCULATION
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Sylvia Rivera Law Project

October 2006 * Issue 8

Gender Action Coalition Takes on Discrimination at HRA

Transgender and gender nonconforming people of color endure constant discrimination when trying to get the benefits and entitlements they deserve. In February, TransJustice, a working group of the Audre Lorde Project by and for transgender and gender nonconforming people of color, called a meeting to strategize about these problems.

At this historic meeting, community members and allies gathered together to share experiences of mistreatment at the Human Resources Administration (HRA). HRA is the city agency in charge of most public benefits in New York City, including public assistance, supportive housing, Medicaid, food stamps, and adult protective services.

The group quickly formed into a powerful coalition of individuals and organizations dedicated to eradicating discrimination against our community at HRA. Together, the newly formed Gender Action Coalition (GAC) has identified targets and strategies and developed a mission statement, which follows:

The Gender Action Coalition works to guarantee that all transgender and gender nonconforming people receive safe, affirming, and non-discriminatory services when accessing the Human Resources Administration. We work to ensure the implementation and practice of trans-sensitive assistance and to ensure that agency staff receive information and training to better serve transgender and gender nonconforming consumers. We also strive to empower and educate our community in connection with HRA issues. The Coalition was initiated by transgender and gender nonconforming people of color and is comprised of our community members and allies. We believe all people should be able to access public assistance and services without fear of discrimination because of their gender identity or expression, race, class, immigration history, disability, or sexual orientation.

The Sylvia Rivera Law Project is proud to be one of the members of this coalition. Over the years SRLP has too often seen our clients and community denied the basic necessities they need to survive because of their gender identity or expression. Trans people have been ridiculously and unjustly turned away for not wearing "gender appropriate" clothing. "People have lost their benefits just for going to the bathroom," says Gabriel Arkles, an Equal Justice Works Fellow at SRLP who has been participating in GAC. The work of GAC compliments other work SRLP continues to be engaged in with HRA, such as long-term work with the Human Resources Administration Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) to help establish best practices for serving and working with transgender and gender non-conforming people.

GAC worked with TransJustice to protest discrimination against trans and gender nonconforming people by HRA during the annual Trans Day of Action. Thanks to the hard work of TransJustice and the help of allies, the Trans Day of Action was another great success, even despite the denial of a permit to rally outside of HRA's office by the city.

Story continues page 5

CONTEST!
help us name our newsletter!

The newsletter of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project has recently undergone an exciting makeover, however, it is still in search of a new name. Please send us your ideas for a new name for the newsletter. The winning entry will appear on the front of the next issue. If we pick your name, you win a SRLP t-shirt!

Send submissions to ryder@srlp.org or to our address, ATTN: Ryder Diaz by January 31, 2006. Please include your name and contact information.



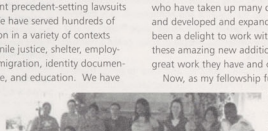
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FROM THE FOUNDER

Dear Friends of SRLP,

SRLP celebrated our fourth year this August, and we had a great deal to celebrate. In the last four years, we have grown from a one-person fellowship projet housed in a larger non-profit, to an independent non-profit with four full-time and four part-time staff and an inovative collective governance structure that includes 30 community members. We have won and continue to fight significant precedent-setting lawsuits for transgender rights. We have served hundreds of clients facing discrimination in a variety of contexts including foster care, juvenile justice, shelter, employment, criminal justice, immigration, identity documentation, welfare, health care, and education. We have trained thousands of service providers, government employees, activists and students on issues related to making services and institutions non-discriminatory environments for trans people, and on taking up leadership in the quest for gender justice. Overall, we have become a force of significant change, working to build analysis and coalition on issues of gender, racial, and economic justice.



Founding SRLP and working with the wonderful people who have developed and supported SRLP as staff, collective members, clients, funders, volunteers, and interns has been the most enriching learning experience of my life. SRLP's approach to deeply engaging racial justice analysis inside our organization, and our commitment to a highly efficient and effective non-hierarchical governance structure have built new skills, relationships, and understanding amongst all of us who have been a part of that process. Personally, my own understanding of political change has grown significantly.

When I founded SRLP, I was clear that I wanted to approach my position in the organization with a clear vision of leaving the founder role sooner than later, as I was aware of the many organizations that have suffered from failing to develop new leadership. For the last year and a half, SRLP has been working specifically on moving me out of the founder role. Our allies at Community Resource Exchange helped us develop a transition plan that has been an incredible support to the process. In September 2005, I stopped doing direct legal services and began to focus my time on a policy-oriented fellowship project, which allowed me to begin changing my role in the organization. Since then, SRLP has brought on new staff members who have taken up many of the duties I once performed and developed and expanded those job roles. It has been a delight to work with my coworkers on training these amazing new additions to our staff and seeing the great work they have and continue to contribute.

Now, as my fellowship funding wraped up in August 2006, I have completed my transition out of the founder role at SRLP. I believe that my leaving will help make room for new leadership, and that SRLP's continued commitment to the leadership of people of color, trans, intersex, and gender non-conforming people, and low-income people will continue to bring visionary leaders into the organization. I will continue to work with SRLP as a collective member, focusing on fundraising efforts. I am looking forward to a two-year teaching fellowship I have been granted through the UCLA Law School William's Project and Harvard Law School, which will allow me to spend some time reflecting and writing over the next two years.

I am glad to have made this transition at a time when the organization is thriving, growing, and changing to meet the needs of the community we serve. I know that I can count on you to continue to support SRLP in doing our vital work, and I appreciate all the ways that your support has already been influential in helping us come to where we are. I look forward to working with you from my new organizational vantage point, and watching our communities continue to join the mounting fight for justice that I have no doubt we are certain to win.

Best,
Dean Spade

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

A HUGE THANK YOU TO ALL WHO HAVE SENT IN FINANCIAL SUPPORT SINCE MARCH:

Anonymous, Saadia Aleem, Jack Aponte, Beau Archer, Erich Baierl and Rudy Estrada, Alexandra Barron, Irving Batz, Ursula Batz, Janet Baus, Leora Bechor, Caprice Bellefluer, Innocence Bello, David Bennion, Robert Beridha, Leona Bessonova, Maggie Bittel, Richard Blum, AA Bronson, Diane Bruessow, Richard Burns, Ed Campanelli, Olivia Campbell, Bree Carlson, Matthew Carmondy, Jack Cassidy, Namita Chad, Carol Ann Chavez, Young Choe, M. Samuel Choi, Cheryl Bjorn Clancy, Leigha Cohen, Susan Convery, Cindi Creager, CUNY School of Law Foundation, Savitri Durkee, Jerry Dasti, Megan Davidson and Shawn Onsgard, Lisa Davis, Debevoise and Plimpton LLP, Jacqueline DeCarlo, Jean Del Colliano, Danielle Del Vecchio, Ryder Diaz, Alexey Dmitriyov, Emily Drabinski, Martin Duberman, Eli Dueker, Phil Duran, Andrew Elmore, Laura Esner, Allen Frame, Katherine Franke, Sylvia Freed, Nadia Gareeb, Tory Gavito, Daniel Gillmor, Gail Gildewell, Mark Goldberg, Judith Goldliner and Lemuel Srolovic, Daniel Gonsalves, Nick Gorton, Sorbrique Grant, Cindy Greenberg, Asha Greer, Arnold Grossman, Gael Gundin Guevara, Drake Hagner, Justin Haines, Elizabeth Hay, Rebekah Heilman, Jessi Hempel, Barrett Hipes, Rebecca Hoffman, Adriene Holder, Julie Hollar, Housing Works, Alanna Howe, Mystique I. Brent, Kemi Ilesanmi, Jorge Irizarry, Emily Izenstein, Dipty Jain, Kate Jerman, Vinita Jethwani, David Jones, Sonia Katyal, Sandor Katz, Aelis Kennedy, Charles King, Melissa Kohner, Tamar Kraft-Stolar, Cole Krawitz, Yetta Kurland, Fabian Kuttner, Hans Kuzmich, Lisa Kwock, Kate Crane Lawrence, Rosa Lee, Marc Leonard, Ross Levi, Donna Levinsohn, Nathan Levitt, Jeff Light, Christian J. Lillis, Emiia Lombardi, Cayden Lovejoy and Chelsea Ross Green, Susan Lowenstein, Maria Lugones, Mathew Lyons and Virginia Claire Mcguire, Rusty Mae Moore, Megan Manahan, Lee Marcroft and Christine Marcroft, Liz Margolies, Stephanie Marnin, Gal Mayer, Tey Meadow, Michelle Miles, Rusty Mae Moore, Ananya Mukherjea, Soniya Munshi, Versha Munshi and Jason South, Christopher Murray, Lisa Mottet, National Lawyers Guild, Julie Netherland, Robert Newman, Gail Nichols, Michelle O'Brien, Eli Ogburn, Camile Pahwa, KJ Pallegedara, Allison Palmer, Doreen Pando, Crystal Parikh, Karuna Patel, Dee Perez, Kym Platt and Lisa Pilato, Anchebe Powell, Ryan Pryor, Jess Reed, Flavio Risech, K.R. Roberto, Benjamin Robin, Raymond Rodriguez, Ethan Roeder, Jacob Rolls, Darren Rosenblum, Sandy Rosin, Emily Ruben and William Long, Kate Rubin, Sir Real, Sandy Russo, Rafael Samanez, Diego Sanchez, Nilsa Saniel, Lisa Sbrana, Daniel Schaffer, Deb Schwartz, Eric Serxner, Mark Sexton, Hasan Shafiqullah, Tom Shanahan, Meryl Shapiro, Jennifer Shoclay, Killer Sideburns, Saul Silva, Silver Lining Foundation, Sonja Sivesind, Craig Sloane, Erin Small, Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal LLP, Jamie Stafford-Hill, Edward Stein, Susanna Stein, Amanda Strogoff, Rania and Katrina Spade, Michael Swirsky, RJ Thompson, Emily Thuma, Mary Pat Thuma, Susan V. Tipograph, Claire Tixeire, Peter Travitsky, Marianne Turner, Urvashi Vaid, Bharti Wahi and Benjamin Muedeking, Mike Waldman, Tanya Walker, Joyce Warshow, Marcus Waterbury, Dava Weinstein, Erica Weinstein, James Wellman, Chad Wheeless, Stefanie Wess, Ben Weston, Mary Wight, Maggie Williams, Reid Williams, Craig Willse, KayCee Wimbish, Mee Xione, Emily Woo Yamasaki and Cynthia Brink, Janna Yisrael **and thank you to the Foundations that support our work: Arcus Foundation, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, Child Welfare Fund, Equal Justice Works, Gill Foundation, Kicking Assets, New Voices, New York Foundation, Open Society Institute, Out Fund, Paul Rapoport Foundation, Social Science Research Council, Third Wave Foundation, Threshold Foundation, Tides Foundation and the Union Square Awards.**

SPECIAL GIFTS

In honor of Peter Goldschimidt

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Polaroid JoyCam Film
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Ink cartridges for printer, copier and fax

SYLVIA RIVERA LAW PROJECT

Volume 4, Number 2, October 2006

Newsletter editors, contributors and producers:

Gabriel Arkles, Ryder Diaz, Pooja Gehi, D. Horowitz, Niko Kowell, Soraya Palmer, Sonja Sivesind, Dean Spade

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SRLP
322 8th Avenue
3rd Floor New York, NY 10001

or visit our website at www.srlp.org

YOUR SUPPORT KEEPS US AFLOAT!

The Sylvia Rivera Law Project continues to grow in response to the great need facing our community. To finance our efforts, we rely on grassroots support from our community. While much of our funding comes from foundations, a large percentage comes from individual donors and is an essential component of our existence. Our successful fundraising events and activities are made possible by volunteer energy and community support.

SRLP'S AUGUST RECEPTION A HIT!

SRLP's August 21st cocktail reception for donors and supporters was great fun. We were hosted by Lasagna Ristorante on 8th Avenue, and had a great time networking over delicious hors d'oeuvres and drinks. We also honored the birthday of SRLP Board Chair, Margarita Guzman, who gave and excellent presentation about SRLP's recent key work.

Margarita discussed SRLP's current strategic planning process, where, after four years of community leadership and support, we are assessing how to maximize our successful strategies and collaborations to implement deep and sustaining change. She also discussed SRLP's ongoing work with the new film "Cruel and Unusual" (cruelandunusualfilm.com), which SRLP helped develop with the filmmakers and is currently using as a key teaching and mobilizing tool nationwide regarding the violence faced by trans, intersex, and gender non-conforming people in prisons.

SRLP Founder, Dean Spade, shared information about SRLP's recent work to create a national roundtable discussion about the imprisonment of trans people, and shared news of increasing rollback on rights that trans people are facing due to new federal rules regarding ID. Dean urged SRLP supporters to pledge sustaining, consistent support right now, in order to help the organization build strategies for resistance not only to fight for trans rights, but also to defend against attacks on the gains that the last 30 years of trans activism have produced.

The reception was an excellent opportunity for a range of activists, media makers, advocates, service providers, and supporters to discuss our approaches to social change, to mingle and enjoy delicious food, and to celebrate the work of SRLP's collective members.

House Party for the Legal Community

This September, SRLP hosted a house party for the legal community at the home of Reid Williams. The event also celebrated the efforts and work of Dean Spade, SRLP's departing founder, as we wished him well in this future endeavors. The space was packed with people who came to show support for SRLP's mission. Many thanks to Lucas Lin of Dumpling Man Resturant for providing party-goers with delicious, steaming dumplings throughout the evening. A huge thank you to the host committee of this event for all their efforts in helping to raise over $4,500 to support SRLP!



Lucas Lin dazzles with dumplings



Hasan Shafiqullah urges guests to pull out their checkbooks for SRLP

Health and Education House Party

Thank you to those who attended our Health and Education House Party this March. Many health-related professionals, academics, and educators came out to support the work of SRLP in the areas of housing, health care, education, and safety from violence. Thank you to Mariette Pathy Allen, for opening her home to this event and to the host committee of this event for helping to plan and coordinate this exciting party that raised over $3,500 to keep our doors open to our community!

SPOTLIGHT ON SRLP

Connecting Causes: Organizing Support Team and Direct Service Team collaboration

The Organizing Support Team (OST) and the Direct Services Team (DST) of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP) are engaged in an exciting collaboration. We interview DST member, Gabriel Arkles to learn more about this important work.

What does the term "organizing support" mean and how does it relate to SRLP's work as a legal services organization?

While SRLP does not coordinate direct action campaigns, we work closely with and provide support to organizations that do because we believe that this work is vitally important to achieving meaningful social change. Specifically we provide support to NYC organizations such as Globe, FIERCE!, and the Audre Lorde Project (ALP). All of which have organizing campaigns run by and for transgender people. There are several reasons why SRLP, as a legal organization, supports grassroots direct action campaigns and community organizing. SRLP believes that although legal reform can be effective, such as in amending the injustices found in the prison complex, but cannot on its own alter the systemic injustices inherent in the way prisons in this country operate. Entire communities are responsible for creating this systemic change. SRLP believes in using this combination of strategies to achieve social change. SRLP provides direct services in the form of legal advocacy because we understand that being low-income, or homeless, makes it more difficult to participate politically. SRLP works to provide for the basic needs of our community and at the same time encourages clients to get involved politically. Therefore, the DST and OST work together very closely, providing legal services to meet the important needs of our community and collaborating with grassroots organizing campaigns to engage our community in that transformative work.

How do the OST and DST support community organizing?

The OST and DST work to support organizing campaigns in several ways. For example, SRLP gave organizational support for Trans Day of Action by providing the march's participants with information in case of arrest, establishing a legal hotline in case of arrests, and having SRLP legal observers visible and active at the event. The DST also provides onsite legal clinics for our community members at community organizations, provide Know Your Rights trainings, and are invited to attend community meetings. This makes our services more accessible to more people in our community. The OST follows up with clients who are interested in becoming involved in organizing campaigns and serve as liaisons with community direct action groups and SRLP.

What is the theory of the relationship between organizing and services that's behind this collaboration?

There is a false dichotomy between community mobilization and direct services. The Black Panther Party worked to meet the basic needs of the people, by doing such things as the breakfast program, but they also mobilized the community. We saw here that meeting basic needs can help to mobilize communities. Community organizing puts pressure on litigation and mobilization, and these two strategies are not necessarily disconnected.

How does your work with FIERCE! relate to this theory?

SRLP works with FIERCE in several ways, to aid with the struggle against racial and gender profiling by the NYPD's 6th precinct and the elimination of public space for queer youth. On SRLP's end, we coordinate onsite legal clinics with the help of FIERCE!, put the word out to our community and clients about the work that FIERCE! engages in, and encourage people to attend their meetings. SRLP can also monitor police misconduct in different ways and can bring law suits against the police department.

What are the Direct Services Team and Organizing Support Team working together on right now?

A large project that the DST and OST are currently working on is the Survey and Strategy Project. This project arose because there is virtually no data about low-income, transgender people of color. The OST developed the survey and design and will be involved in 6 months of data collection. This survey will enable us to better advocate and organize with our community.

CONNECTED STRUGGLES: THE WAR ON TERROR AND TRANSPEOPLE

The ongoing attack on immigrant rights directly affects our clients, and it also further clarifies the dire need for our anti-oppression work. The political agenda behind recent anti-immigrant bills, specifically H.R. 4437 and the REAL ID Act, is parallel to all historical agendas that sought to oppress people who are not the "ideal majority": white, male, straight, non-trans, and wealthy. By creating a national agenda that is obsessed with "difference" – be it through the "War on Terror,"



Community members take to the streets in this summer's TransMarch

the hyper-criminalization of people of color, or the profiling of all transgender women as prostitutes, everyone who is not part of the "majority" is a victim of oppression. September 11th continued a legacy of immigrants as the primary and overt targets of discrimination, but the negative effects of this agenda extend to all of us.

The REAL ID Act, passed in May 2005, establishes federal standards for state issued driver's licenses and ID cards. Although adoption of the federal standards are optional, state issued licenses that do not meet the federal government's guidelines will not be recognized by any federal agency as valid proof of identification. Under the rules being considered, a state would have to require proof of citizenship or legal presence, proof of an address, and proof of a Social Security Number before granting a driver's license. States would also need to check the legal status of non-citizens against a national immigration database, save copies of any documents shown, and store a digital image of the face of each applicant.

This overt profiling in the name of "national security" keeps folks from attaining drivers' licenses, and numerous other federal benefits simply because of their "differences." For transgender people, this bill is extremely problematic.

Because trans people often don't have matching names and genders on their driver's licenses, immigration documents, proof of residence and/or social security cards, they are likely to have "no–match" problems. When there is a "SSI no-match" (where the information on a social security card does not match the drivers license), the applicant will be denied this vital piece of identification. Without a Federal identification card, people will be denied entrance to federal buildings, access to benefits, and numerous other basic needs from boarding an airplane to accessing a library card.

H.R. 4437, which passed in the House of Representatives last fall, presents an increased urgency in the agenda against "differences." This recent legislation actually criminalizes immigrants who are vital contributors to our society. According to this bill, immigrants who work, pay taxes, enrich our economy, yet are undocumented, will be deemed "aggravated felons" under U.S. law. In addition to criminalizing a large part of the immigrant community, the bill criminalizes public schoolteachers, immigrants' family members, religious and community workers who "assist" undocumented immigrants. By criminalizing those who assist undocumented immigrants, H.R. 4437 seeks to position oppressed groups against their support systems.

As an organization that serves transgender, gender non-conforming, and intersex people who are low-income and/or of color, SRLP stands in solidarity against the anti-immigrant agenda that helps fuel the "War on Terror." Not only does this legislation negatively impact our community, it also provides a transparent means for punishing folks for being outside of the "majority." These modern efforts to oppress must be rejected just as surely and emphatically as their predecessors.

U.S. QUESTIONED ON RECORD OF POLICE BRUTALITY AND ABUSE OF TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

Monday July 18th and Tuesday July 19th, the U.S. government was questioned by the United Nationsabout the alarming rate of police brutality against transgender people and the shockingly high murder rate of transgender people, when compared to the rest of the population.

In particular, Michael O'Flaherty of Ireland, one of the U.N. experts, highlighted statistics indicating that transgender people are subject to high rates of violence by police. According to an advocacy agency in New York, 22% of their transgender clients have been abused by police officers. Mr. O'Flaherty was particularly concerned and reported numbers that 1 in 12 transgender people are likely to be murdered, compared with 1 in 18,000 people in the population generally.

Mr. O'Flaherty asked if the U.S. was familiar with Amnesty International's recent report Stonewalled: Police Abuse and Misconduct Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in the U.S., as well as the U.S. government's responses to the report and consideration of the report's recommendations.

Mr. O'Flaherty raised the alarming abuse of transgender people on Tuesday in light of the U.S. government's failure to address his concerns. Despite emphasizing the U.S. government's commitment to prosecuting hate crimes, the U.S. representative Wan Kim, who heads the civil rights division of the Justice Department, left the question of police brutality against transgender people unanswered.

"The Committee's questions of the U.S. government were a landmark moment for the rights of transgender people," said Davim Horowitz of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project. "While the government has failed to acknowledge the existence of transgender people and communities, it is tremendously exciting that the Human Rights Committee is interested in the police abuse of transgender people."

TAKING ON HRA

continued from page 1

GAC is excited to move ahead to work with HRA to improve services to transgender and gender nonconforming consumers and to build knowledge and power in our communities. This important work needs the help of the whole community to succeed.



How you can help:

- Help us gather statements! We are seeking statements from trans and gender nonconforming people who have experienced mistreatment at HRA, as well as from service providers and community organizers who can share information about the experiences of clients and members.
- Join the coalition! If you are a trans or gender nonconforming person of color who has accessed benefits at HRA or an ally who wants to get involved and support this work, join us for a GAC meeting.
- Spread the word! Give out flyers about our work to others you think might be interested.

To find out the date of the next meeting, get copies of our flyers, or get copies of the form for collecting statements, you can contact any member of GAC, including the Audre Lorde Project (718-596-0342) or SRLP (212-337-8550).

COMMUNITY ALERT!

After four years of work led by SRLP, NYC is on the verge of passing new rules for birth certificates for trans people! Please come out to the public hearing to show your support on Oct. 30, from 2-4pm, at 125 Worth Street.