

into the wheat fields

Teens share their experience

Youths came from all over the state, searching for information, for people like them and to share their experiences.

Some were diversity facilitators, such as the group from Seattle that held its own session. Others, like the group from Wentachee, were searching for people who shared their experience. Wentachee is not a haven for gay, lesbian, bisexual or questioning youth, most of the youth agreed.



Sarah Studeman.

The youth were also in different stages in their coming out and coming to terms with their sexuality. Regardless of their differences though, the group shares something in common: they all identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or allies. They also share a similarity in that they have chosen to come to the third annual youth conference to learn more about who they are.

"It (the conference) has shown me that there are so many gay male youth here," said Erik Warren, 16, from Wantechee. "I didn't know

they existed."

Warren is out to his parents and to most of his friends. Although there is a sense of freedom that comes from being out, Warren said he also feels a responsibility.

"I try to be a role model," he said. "I am trying to make a difference with stereotypes (people have about gays)."

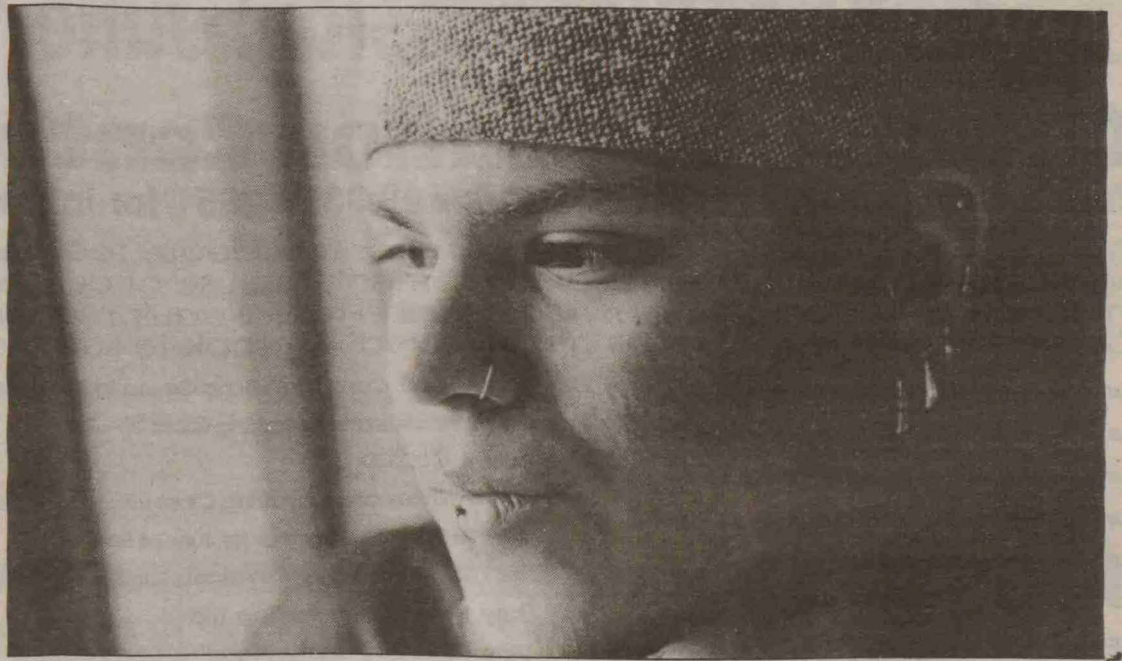
Referring to the two men who protested the conference saying WSU is recruiting them to be homosexuals, Warren said, the protest is based on ignorance.

"You can't recruit something like that," he said. "There is the saying that homosexuals are the breeding ground for homosexuals. That is untrue, heterosexuals are the breeding ground for homosexuals."

It is good to see people my age who are gay," Warren said.

Sarah Studeman is a bisexual teen who came to the conference searching for understanding and support.

"I felt strength," she said. "Even though I felt alone at times, I know



Erik Warren said he feels a sense of responsibility to erase stereotypes.

there are people who share my feel-

ings."

Studeman is not out to her family and doubts her conservative family will be accepting, she said. She goes to an alternative high school, because she could not "deal with their (her class mates) ignorance." Her alternative school is more affirming and accepting, she said.

Studeman said she felt more accepted at the conference, adding "something I don't get at home often."

Matt Haberman, a teen from Wentachee, said he is in a state of confusion about his homosexuality. He grew up in a conservative Catholic family and believes homosexuality is unnatural and a sin. He said he came to the conference to learn more about his sexuality.

"Sex was created for reproduction," Haberman said. "We are kind of going backward against nature."

He said he is not as liberal as most of the gay people he has met and that often results in some confusion about his sexuality. The confusion has led to isolation in high school and has made him mature faster, Haberman said.

"I think I can say I am gay and not be practicing it," he said. "You can't change the way you feel even if you don't practice it."

He said his main purpose in coming to the conference is to erase the discrimination gays, lesbians and bisexuals face.

"No matter what you believe in you have the right to be respected and loved," Haberman said.



Matt Haberman said he is still confused about his sexuality.



Two students protested the conference on Friday.



Members of GLBA hold hands at the closing ceremony of the conference under a ribbon attendants tied. The ribbons were tied after most of the attendants said a few words about what the conference has meant to them.

70-year-old transvestite speaks on the joys and frustration of cross dressing

Allison Marsh is a 70-year-old man who likes to dress as a woman. Allison, a married man with two children, prefers to be called a she when dressed as a woman. A resident of Olympia, she attended the youth conference and gave a lecture titled, "Who Are the Transgendered People?"

She said she has always wanted to dress as a woman, but she hated her desire to do so. After three therapists she decided to begin cross dressing, and learn more about cross dressing and why she wanted to do it.

Marsh said she believes she was born as a transvestite, and can control her urge to dress as female. However, she said, "there is nothing wrong with wanting to dress as a woman as long as we are not hurting anybody else."

"We all have a female part that needs to be expressed," she said. "It is not a question of logic, it is sim-

ply who (we) are."

Marsh also attempted to dismantle some common stereotypes about what transvestite people are. She said most transvestites are married heterosexual men who do not desire a sex change and who do not necessarily want to be the other sex.

"I don't dislike my role as a man," Marsh said. "I just have

another desire to express my female part."

The situation for transvestite and transgendered people has improved in that more support groups are available, she said. Transvestites also are more accepted in places they have not been accepted before.

"Each of us share a responsibility to teach that we are not the enemy of straight people," she said.

Marsh's cross dressing has led to some humorous situations, she said. Her wife and her have taken vacations with Marsh dressed as a

female. The assumption often is that the two are retired teachers traveling together.

One of the most humorous and embarrassing situations is probably a horse back riding experience while on vacation with her wife, she said. Marsh was riding a horse on the farm they were visiting when it went out of control and started going under branches. She had to hold on to her wig with one hand while trying to calm the horse down.

Restrooms also often pose a problem, she said.

“It is not a question of logic. It is simply who we are.”

Allison Marsh
Cross dresser

Staff photo by Brett Larson