

GOALS & VISION

CANARIES IN THE COALMINES

LGBT STUDENTS IN SMALL ISOLATED SOCIETIES

ANSO

ANSO is the Association of Nordic LGBT Student Organizations (LGBT stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered.). Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and the Faroes Islands are all members of ANSO, and are represented by 6 LGBT student organizations in total. Greenland is in the process of becoming a member. The seat of ANSO's legal entity is situated on Mykines in the Faroes Islands.

ANSO is a young non-profit, non-governmental association with high ambitions, whose overall goals are:

- To improve the situation for LGBT students throughout the Nordic region
- To provide a platform for addressing LGBT student issues and enhance cooperation between LGBT- student groups throughout the Nordic region

ANSO CONFERENCE 2005 – CANARIES IN THE COALMINES

We have chosen the image of canaries in the coalmines to symbolize the presence of LGBT students within society for this next conference. In the days of mining, there were sometime leaks of gas to be feared from within the mines. This was very dangerous for the workers, for the gas could be lethal. Therefore they often kept canaries within the depths of these mines. If there was too much gas the canaries were the first to die. In this way the song of the canaries down there represented good air to breathe – an environment fit for humans.

We invite you to look upon the student LGBT community as an indicator of the air to breath within a society. Students are highly mobile, and therefore easily come and go according to the social atmosphere. How many LGBT students do you know, that are living near you? See them as songs of life from a beautiful bird.

SMALL SOCIETIES AND LGBT STUDENTS

HOW DO SMALL (ISOLATED) SOCIETIES RISE TO THE CHALLENGE OF CREATING SPACE FOR LGBT STUDENTS?

During the upcoming conference ANSO would like to focus on the special challenges met by LGBT students within small societies. Therefore it has been decided to hold it in the Faroes Islands. Being a small and (at least geographically) isolated community, the situation there reflects the goals and vision of the next conference pretty accurately.

Take Iceland for instance, where attention has been drawn to an unusually high suicide rate amongst young men in small, isolated towns and communities. The hypotheses is that many of them could be related to homosexuality, where the lack of support and understanding these youngsters face in their close environment play a crucial role. Some of them might be students – or potential students, who never got the chance to live their lives to the fullest.

THE GOALS OF THIS ANSO CONFERENCE IN PARTICULAR ARE THEREFORE TO:

- Identify and define the matters at hand – in particular the the social settings and living conditions of young LGBT students in small communities
- Discuss and emphasize positive solutions to the problems they face

WE INTEND TO DO THIS BY

- Initiating constructive debate. By creating a forum where Nordic LGBT students, politicians and researchers meet to discuss topics relevant to LGBT students and their communities

Together our voices will be heard

- Building a network for cooperation and work across the Nordic borders that encompasses both the LGBT student organizations themselves together with all other related authorities, organizations, individuals, researchers, and politicians

United we stand, divided we fall

- The sharing of knowledge: By sharing our experiences and ways of dealing with things we can inspire and help one another in finding successful solutions to the various challenges that Nordic LGBT youth has to face

Together we are wiser

BEING ABLE TO BREATHE

Focusing on positive solutions has positive “side effects”. By providing breathing space for minority groups within our communities we affect the rest of society in a favorable way. “Breathing space” can be defined as a general acceptance of cultural diversity within society:

- The possibility of interacting with society in a broad variety of ways
- Being able to live a lifestyle that you are happy with. To have the opportunity to seek alternatives to and modifications of traditional lifestyles
- Having permission to be yourself; to be supported and allowed to expand and develop as a person within your own emotional framework
- To be accepted as you are – without fear – given that you in turn respect other people’s choices of lifestyle
- To be honoured and recognized as a worthy citizen. To be appreciated for that which you in particular have to offer to society, for all the things that make you unique

All of the above – and many more things for that matter – bear witness to good breathing space within a society. ANSO would like to focus on the creation and support of this crucial element for the social health of LGBT students throughout the Nordic region.

CREATIVITY

The ANSO conference would like to draw attention to the positive effects of creativity and innovation in society. We intend to do this by trying to shed light on how the creation of “breathing space” within a community directly contributes to things like innovation, initiative and quality-of-life enhancing activities such as art, drama and the like.

BUISINESS ATTITUDE

An open, creative social atmosphere is also enhancing to a productive business atmosphere. Being open to new ideas gives the most innovative parts of society the freedom they need to be able to move forward, inspire people and haul the rest of us towards a better future. Productivity is enhanced by openness to new forms of organisation and work.

Comparative economic and social studies in the West show a strong relationship between financial prosperity and the amount of breathing space a society it offers to its citizens. This, of course, applies to everyone in general, but is particularly relevant when it comes to LGBT communities.

Let’s take the tourist industry for example; one of the most favourable sectors to be focused upon these days is the gay market segment. Business seems to bloom wherever LGBT people are allowed to roam around freely. The Nordic countries would do well to cooperate more with one another in this area.

OTHER GROUPS WHO GAIN FROM THIS ATTITUDE

When a society starts opening up and looking beyond the relatively narrow spectrum of its ancient traditions and ways of life, other groups can benefit from this change of perspective. Ethnic groups blossom when society has good rapport with its gay community. This change of attitude acts as a motivating force, and presents them with opportunities to participate in society in a more productive and sophisticated manner than before. A special minority within this crowd is of course the ethnic LGBT community. It definitely needs special attention, and may be the one to gain most from an open-minded society. Again it is important to focus on the immense potential that minorities such as those have to give good things back to society, given that the social conditions are acceptable.

... CANARIES IN COALMINES ...
