



October 28, 2011

Dear Friends,

As you probably know, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ) youth in Rockland continue to be marginalized by their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Despite some progress in many New York communities, there is still a lot of work to be done here. What you may not know is that CANDLE is the *only organization* in Rockland to provide programs specifically aimed at helping these young people, and right now we need your help for one of these programs.

Common Threads Youth Empowerment Retreat is a unique weekend experience for high school students. The retreat aims to create a safe space which supports and empowers LGBTQ youth and their allies. They experience a sense of community and an increased awareness of how to create positive change in areas such as diversity, health, personal safety, political advocacy and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Two students who have attended in past years had this to say about Common Threads: "It made me happier than I have ever been." and "Being here is what I should feel every day of my life."

Over the course of three days, students, accompanied by an adult advisor from their school, learn how to address issues of adolescent health and safety in professionally facilitated workshops. One of the main topics over the last 13 years was, and continues to be, safety in the schools, especially for students who are (or who are *perceived* to be) LGBTQ. They are too often victims of bullying and harassment and are at greater risk of social isolation and internalized homophobia leading to substance abuse, mental health issues and/or suicide.

While CANDLE receives funding from New York State to support all our LGBTQ programs, including Common Threads, this year that funding has been severely reduced. Consequently, we have no choice but to ask the students (and the advisors) to pay a much larger portion of the cost than ever before. Our host for the weekend, The Stony Point Center, has generously reduced their usual fee by 30%. That still leaves us with the daunting task of finding ways to meet all the expenses of the weekend. We know that some students will be able to pay the full cost (\$175), but many others will not.

Won't you consider subsidizing a youngster who wants to attend CANDLE's Common Threads Youth Empowerment retreat, but cannot afford to do so? Your tax deductible contribution to CANDLE, in whatever amount feels right, will be applied to a scholarship for a student who has been accepted into the program, but who cannot pay the full fee of \$175.

It's easy to give. Go to the following website: [www.candlerockland.org/commonthreads](http://www.candlerockland.org/commonthreads) to learn more about Common Threads and to donate today!! We thank you, in advance for your generosity.

Sincerely,

J.R. Cehonski  
Youth Pride Coordinator