

Inclusive Youth 2023-24 Review

In November of 2023, Aria Messer, to create a safe space to hang out for LGBTQ+ youth in Gig Harbor, held the first Inclusive Youth hangout for queer teens. She had begun this process, reserving a space to hold a hangout. While she initiated this effort, she attended a meeting with those who had hosted the 2023 Pride in the Park. The discussion was about building an all-year-round organization for queer people in the greater Gig Harbor community. After the initial meeting in October, Aria opted to co-exist under the banner of Pride Gig Harbor.

After being a part of Pride Gig Harbor for a few months and serving on the board as communications chair, she opted to step down, after her own queer teen was struggling with mental health. Pride Gig Harbor board leadership also requested that any further “events” under their name and banner be halted until they had obtained the non-profit status they desired. Because keeping a consistent offering of safe space was important to Aria (especially in light of her teen’s needs), she decided to continue with hangouts, keep the Inclusive Youth name, and continue operating apart from Pride Gig Harbor.

Our original group statement was:

We exist to create spaces for ALL youth to feel welcome and safe in Gig Harbor and the surrounding areas through organic opportunities to connect and have fun.

Location notes: We have met at a public facility that offers free meeting space if reserved. We cannot reserve more than 56 days in advance, so securing a consistent designated time for this location was challenging for this year. We also considered requesting space from local inclusive churches, but for the sake of those we served feeling safe when many of them have experienced religious trauma, we wanted to keep it free from religious spaces.

November Hangout - November 5th, 2023

Activity: Board/card games and coloring/art supplies were brought and utilized for the youth in attendance.

Snacks: Mini muffins, juice boxes/water/bubbly drinks, and crackers.

Cristy Wahala donated the mini muffins.

Take Home Bag: clear gift bags with chocolate, temp tattoos, stickers, and inspirational notes

Mark Sension happened to be at our hangout location while we were in session and donated \$40 out of his pocket.

Attendance

Leaders/Parents:

Aria Messer
Elise Paget
Doug Urner
Maren Wagner
Cristy Wahala

Youth:

Ryan (he/him)
AJ (she/them)
Kainoa (they/them)
Selene/Ozzie (he/they)
Ember (he/they)
Eamon (he/him)
Charlie (he/they)
Jasper (he/him)

Five adults and eight youths were present.

December Hangout - December 10th, 2023

Activity: Elf the Movie and White Elephant \$ store bags xchange.

Snack: Popcorn Bar & Waters/Fizzy Drinks/Ginger Ale

Take Home Bag: The gift bags and popcorn containers with leftover popcorn & snacks were the "Take Home Bag" offering.

Mezz Schrade provided the white elephant gift bags and snowflake decorations.

Kathryn Crabtree donated \$25 toward snacks.

Lara Young provided chocolate-dipped pretzel sticks.

Attendance

Leaders/Parents:

Aria Messer
Elise Paget
Doug Urner

Youth:

Penelope
Eren
Savannah
Oakley
Greggory
Zafiro + friend
Vyna + friend
McKenzie

Three adults and ten youths were present.

In January, in collaboration with Pride Gig Harbor, Aria facilitated a New Year's Vision Board-making gathering. Most of the people there were adults. Mezz Schrade had their two younger kids present and Aria had one kid present.

During the mid-winter break in February, an all-ages gathering at Sehmel Park occurred. (Unfortunately, it rained on us!) Those present were: Bethany Davis and three kids - Sarah, Emma, and Katelyn; Zafiro Jordon; Anabelle Realized; Maren Wagner and Kianoa; Aria Messer and two kids - Ryan Jr, and Thad; and Doug Urner were present. The kids/youths all had fun, despite the rain. Everyone brought snacks to share among us.

There was no hang-out in March (due to scheduling conflicts and personal family matters that needed focus).

In April, after meeting with the BIPOC groups at Peninsula and Gig Harbor High, Aria decided to expand Inclusive Youth to include: LGBTQ+, BIPOC, Neurodivergent, Differently Abled, and Kind Ally Friends. These minority groups are underserved in Gig Harbor, and she wanted them all to feel like they could have a safe space to connect and have fun. We also added Inclusive Kids to meet separately from Inclusive Teens at the request of many parents who wished there was something for their younger children.

The updated mission statement became:

We exist to create safe spaces for ALL kids and teens in the Gig Harbor and surrounding areas. LGBTQ+, BIPOC, Neurodivergent, Differently Abled, & Kind Allies are welcome!

April Hangout - April 7th, 2024

Inclusive Kids

Book: PRIDE - The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag

Activity: Create your own Pride flag/banner that represents you!

Snacks: Juice boxes and crackers

Take Home Bag: Clear pouch with stickers and a PRIDE flag

Melissa Toronto donated the box of crackers.

Attendance

Leaders/Parents:

Aria Messer

Elise Paget

Doug Urner

Charlie Kloepfel

Mezz Schrade

Brittney & Anthony A.
Katie K.
Dave & Andrea D.
Jenny W.

Kids:
Thaddeus
Eli
Axel
Landry, Jude, Everly (Augestenberg
Foster Kids)
Freddie
Liam and Tay (twins!)
Vera & Maxine

Eleven adults and Eleven kids were present.

April Hangout - April 7th, 2024

Inclusive Teens

Activity: Professor PowerPoint Improv

Snacks: Juice boxes and crackers

Take Home Bag: Stickers and PRIDE flags

Attendance

Leaders/Parents:

Aria Messer
Elise Paget
Doug Urner
Cristy Wahala

Teens: (with signed waivers)

Ryan & friend (Reagan)
Tara
Noah & Michael
Ember & EJ
NoJo Young
Sye

Four adults and nine youths were present.

May Hangout - May 19th, 2024

Inclusive Kids

Book: Amy Wu and the Warm Welcome (different language barriers)

Activity: Chinese box folding (Heidi Steele & Shilu DeBerry - teachers)

Snack: Juice boxes, crackers, and fruit snacks/fruit roll-ups

Take Home Bag: fruit roll-ups, stickers, glow sticks and inclusion topic books

Attendance

Leaders/Parents:

Aria Messer
Elise Paget
Doug Urner
Charlie Koepfel
Heidi Steele
Shilu DeBerry
Jenny & Peter W.

Shelby A.

Kids:

Thad
Vera & Maxine
Leo

Nine adults and four kids were present.

May Hangout - May 19th, 2024

Inclusive Teens

Activity: Mahjong and Paper Folding (Heidi Steele & Shilu DeBerry - teachers)

And “guess the phrase” (NOT hangman - name is triggering)

Snacks: Water bottles/Juice Boxes, fruit roll-ups/fruit snacks, and crackers

Take Home Bag: Folded paper project, and clear pouch with stickers/snacks

Dina DeBerry donated \$50 for this event which went toward snacks & take-home bags.

Attendance

Leaders/Parents:

Aria Messer
Elise Paget
Doug Urner
Heidi Steele
Shilu DeBerry
Charlie Koepfel
Ashley D.

Teens:

Xander
Cora
Xavi
Annabell
Eamon
Ryan & friend (Sam)

Seven adults and seven teens were present.

Due to the meeting room availability, our June hangout was two weeks later, on June 2nd. We opened this one as an all-ages hangout, without differentiating kids and teens.

June Hangout - June 2nd, 2024

Activity: Candy leis for Dads & Grads and PRIDE/Juneteenth beaded bracelet making
Snacks: Chips and juice boxes
Take Home Bag: Pride packs with stickers, pins, glow sticks, and buttons

Attendance

Leaders/Parents:

Aria Messer
Elise Paget
Doug Urner
Shelby A. & Chris L.
Jenny W. & Spouse
Charlie Kloepfel & Mom

Youths:

Leo & Little Sis
Vera & Maxine
Charlie's Little Sis
Thad
Eamon
Annabell

Nine adults and eight youths were present.

We took July off for summer vacations.

We had planned to have a Virtual Talent Show and Fundraiser on August 10th via Zoom. The idea was to highlight local youth and their talents, share an update on what happened this past year, and what we'd like to do moving forward with a request for financial or sponsoring assistance, if possible, from those who can give or help. However, after Aria was in a car accident totaling her car and taking a trip to the ER the day before that was scheduled, we opted to cancel and reschedule. The tentative rescheduling is for Saturday, September 14th at 6 pm on Zoom.

Our first tentative Inclusive Youth is scheduled for September 8th at 11 am for kids and 12:30 for teens. We plan to have a back-to-school fashion show, talk about bullying and empathy, and discuss anything the participants may need or want regarding activities for the year.

Notable Mentions:

At the first Inclusive Kids, a couple who brought their kids mentioned that they moved to Washington from Idaho to be in a safer place for their children. It was affirming to know that they found our group, so they knew there was a safe space in our city for their kids to BE who they are.

Charlie Kloepfel began as a high school senior participant and decided to be a young adult leader for Inclusive Kids. We were grateful for Charlie's help with the younger crowd!

Zafiro Jordan is a young adult who was amazingly helpful during the two hangouts she came to. Her technical help, photography, and interaction with the younger kids at our park hangout was greatly appreciated!

Special Thanks to:

Elise Paget & Doug Urner who attended every hangout as adult leaders.

Mezz Schrade for their donations of time and materials for multiple hangouts.

Cristy Wahala for being an adult leader at two hangouts and donating snacks.

Maren Wagner for being an adult leader at two hangouts.

Mark Sension for his monetary donation at our first hangout.

Lara Young for donating snacks at our Christmas hangout.

Kathryn Crabtree for her monetary donation at our Christmas hangout.

Melissa Toronto for donating snacks at our April hangout.

Heide Steele & ShiLu DeBerry for being guest leaders and teaching us paper folding.

Dina DeBerry for her monetary donation for our May hangout.

Thank you to our Coffee for a Cause supporters:

Morgan Steele

Erin Young

Bethany Davis

Carey Powell

Ashley Ortenzo

Leah Smith

Cathy Roberts

Aria Messer

The average cost of our hangouts has been around \$200. We hoped that Coffee for a Cause would cover that amount each month. We will re-introduce that method of raising funds in September. Otherwise, we would love to have people sponsor a snack or activity by providing what is needed, or contribute financially to help us obtain what is needed for each hangout if there are people who can do so. We would need to have a significant increase in donations to do things outside of our free meeting space and low-cost activities.

We became an official non-profit in July of 2024, so that will help if people would like to have tax-deductible donations. This status will also provide checks and balances and varying ideas and skills contributing to our team.

Thank you for reading our report from the 2023-2024 year! Our financial report is also available for viewing if desired.

Sincerely,

Aria Messer - Founder/Director

Elise Paget - Assistant Director

Doug Urner - Trustee

Mezz Schrade - Trustee

Board of Directors for Inclusive Youth Gig Harbor