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METRO's Cole Foust Discusses New GSA Mixers Supporting Pasco County LGBTQ Youth



METRO hosted their first GSA Mixer in Pasco County last month. (Image provided by Ash Foust)



by
Rachel
Stevenson

Cole Foust began working at METRO Wellness and Community Centers in July of this year as the new LGBTQ Youth and Transgender Program Coordinator. With a Bachelor's Degree in psychology from the University of South Florida in St. Petersburg and a passion for supporting LGBTQ youth, METRO knew that Foust was the right person for the job.

From the start, the organization shared with Foust that they had developed a handful of effective programs for youth in Pinellas County, but wanted to expand them in Hillsborough and Pasco Counties. According to Foust, "Pasco County is severely lacking resources for LGBTQ people and there are many people who are LGBTQ living in Pasco." So, he jumped in to help Metro take on this challenge.



METRO hosted their first GSA Mixer in Pasco County last month. (Image provided by Ash Foust)

“For the youth, there really aren’t resources available,” said Foust. “So, METRO started a peer support group for youth earlier this year. We call the group SAFE, which stands for Supporting [Young] Adults For Equality. It’s a place where youth can come and be understood and be seen for whoever they are.”

These support groups cover a variety of topics such as gender expression, gender identity, current events, sexual orientations, coming out to family, and what it’s like living in Pasco County as an LGBTQ individual. The program has already made an impact. In fact, the Pasco County School District has hired LGBT liaison Jackie Jackson-Dean, a radical move for Pasco County.

Following the success of the support groups, Foust and Jackson-Dean came together to figure out how to get all of the high school Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) youth together from across the county for a more interactive event. “These kids are out there, but they don’t know there are others out there like them,” emphasized Foust.

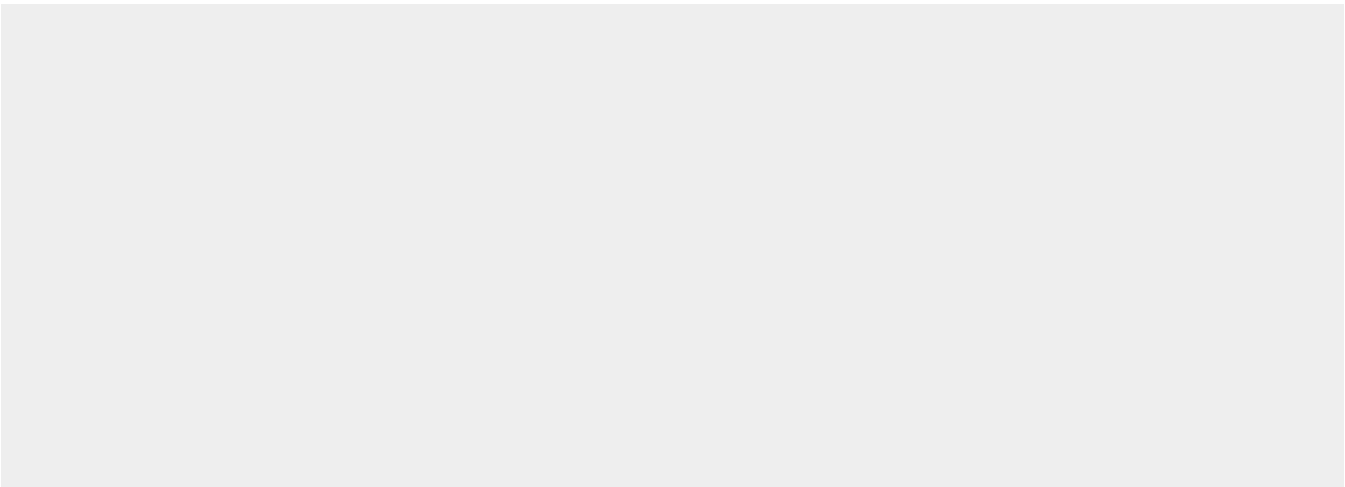




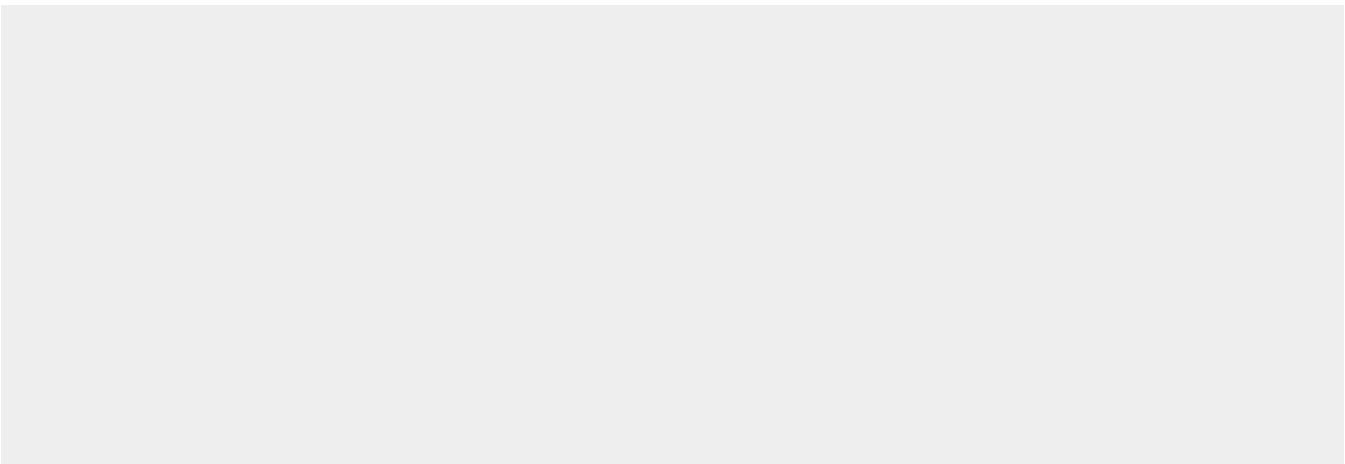
Image provided by Ash Foust

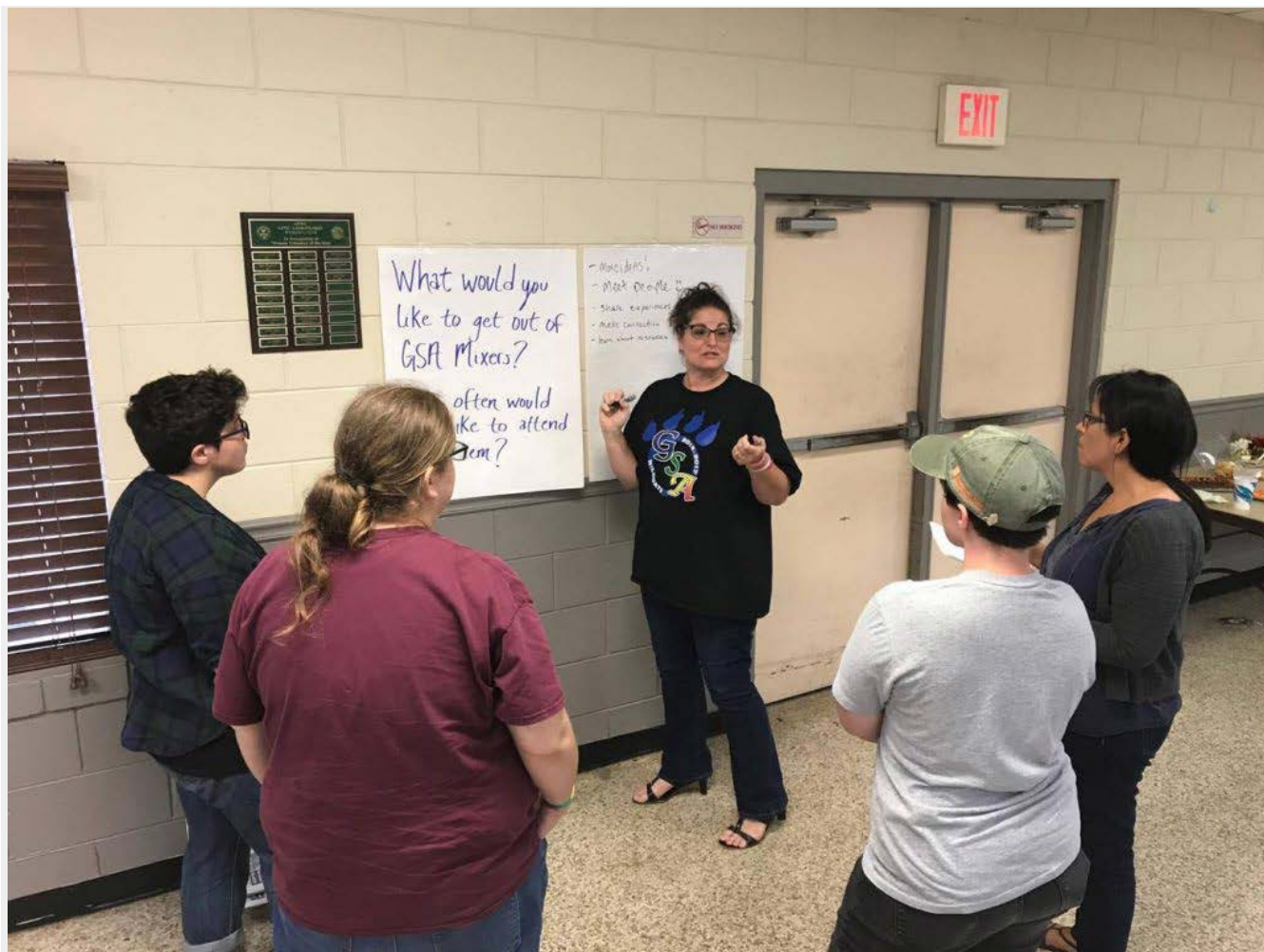
The two teamed up and hosted a Pasco GSA mixer. "We had about 20 people show up. We had students from all across the county from the east side to the west side. We met in Land O'Lakes. It was a really great night."

The mixer kicked off with an ice breaker where kids were told various facts and moved around the room based upon whether or not that fact related to them. They then used a "world cafe style discussion" activity where large Post-It paper was hung around the room with questions like, "What are you doing to be inclusive at your school?" and "what events is your LGBTQ club doing throughout the year?"

The President of New Port Richey's Pasco State College Pride Club also visited the group to share her coming out story and how empowering it feels to be a student leader. At the end of the program, participants were asked to provide takeaways and levels of interest for future events.

According to Foust, the kids are interested in meeting "as often as possible," although METRO will most likely host these mixers on a monthly basis.





Participants answered group questions. (Image provided by Ash Foust)

The GSA Mixer is funded through METRO's annual budget, although community members will often pitch in extra to cover the cost of youth program needs. "We try to keep our youth programs free. We have some really great people in the community who frequently donate to us. We recently had a Friday the 13th Monster Bash and that was because of donations from community members."

METRO's SAFE Youth Groups welcome youth ages 13-18 and their general SAFE Nights on Friday and Saturday at the St Petersburg Welcome Center include youth ages 13-22.

As for new projects, Foust says METRO is hopeful to add a couple of new events to PASCO County. Right now, Foust and Jackson-Dean are bathing in the afterglow of their mixer success, but plan to reconnect later this month to discuss future initiatives.

Foust also pointed out that METRO has a satellite office in New Port Richey. People can call the Tampa and St Pete offices to schedule behavioral health or primary care appointments in the New Port Richey location.

Interested in learning more about METRO's programs for youth? [Click here](#).

Tags Cole Foust LGBTQ Metro nonprofit teens youth

Category Live

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Rachel Stevenson is an award-winning speaker, writer, diversity consultant, and LGBT advocate. She is the Founder of LGBT Equality Alliance, a Chester County, PA nonprofit organization, and CEO of OUTCOAST, an online marketing and



concierge platform marketing the Gulf Coast as an LGBTQ-inclusive place to VISIT, CELEBRATE, and LIVE. Rachel is also an avid event photographer and has captured photos for LGBT organizations around the world, including the IGLTA, NGLCC, NLGJA, and Out & Equal.

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