

The two letters on this page were sent to the New Trier News by LGBTQIA+ identifying students, and speak to the environment they faced at New Trier. Their identities remained anonymous for safety reasons.

From the archives: The letter below was originally published on Feb. 5, 1993

Letter to the Editors

Gay student speaks out

From the archives: The letter below was originally published on Oct. 15, 2017

Letter to the editor

The New Trier News does not normally publish anonymous letters. However, after meeting with this student, we decided to keep the letter anonymous to protect their safety.

I'm writing to the editors of the New Trier News in order to articulate my strong disagreement with the sentiments expressed in the Staff Editorial article entitled "Give Credit Where Credit's Due."

This article begins with a thesis: "New Trier is an inclusive institution," and continues on by pointing out things such as the inclusion of a clause into syllabuses no one reads, the introduction of gender studies into the curriculum of the class that Trevians take the least seriously (health), and the introduction of unisex bathrooms.

To be clear, none of these are bad ideas. However, with the exception of unisex bathrooms, I seriously doubt that these have made a substantial positive impact on any LGBTQ+ identifying Trevians. They certainly haven't changed anything for me. As a closeted male bisexual, the implementation of these policies hasn't changed the environment of New Trier for me. I would still not be comfortable coming out at New Trier.

The article mentions that although there is homophobia at New Trier, many more Trevians are allies to the queer community. This might be true in some circles, but as a guy who participates in a sports team, rampant and casual homophobia is not the exception: it's the norm. No action by the supposedly pro-LGBTQ+ administration has changed that.

Even worse than their inaction is their self-congratulating. Thinking that their putting signs up that say "we accept everyone" has done nothing to curb my fear of exiting the closet. Their repeated assurances that what they are doing is even mildly impactful works to isolate me and presumably others like me; there is no supportive community at New Trier, because instead of working to create one, the administration acts as if they've already done so.

The article also criticizes "those who seek to generalize the LGBTQ experience." This is an odd criticism to me, considering the nature of the editorial, which actively generalizes the LGBTQ experience. For those already uncloseted or those who have never struggled with their sexuality, it may be hard to truly understand the struggle of somebody like me, and I understand that. But to completely gloss over the idea that people like me exist perpetuates the ignorance that makes New Trier what it is: an unsafe and uncomfortable place for many of its LGBTQ+ students.

Dear fellow NT students and faculty,

I'm writing to you to open your hearts and minds to a subject that is forgotten and ignored in our society. It is teen homosexuality. I am an NT student and a homosexual.

I compose a larger than is acknowledged minority. I feel that this Harvard of high schools is lacking severely in educating my peers and even my faculty about this "taboo" subject.

I SUBMITTED this to the New Trier News because I know that the News is a highly respected newspaper and the majority of students and faculty read it. What a perfect place for you to hear about a typical day in the life of a gay teen at NT.

I wake up in the morning to trek through the halls of NT with my dark secret. I dare not let anyone be suspicious of it, for if I did, I would be ridiculed.

I go to my classes, often hearing a small group of ignorant students telling jokes about fags, and telling each other what they would do if they ever met a homosexual.

ANY HETEROSEXUAL cannot imagine the feeling a homosexual like myself endures. A cold chill runs down my spine, but I keep my resentment towards them to myself, knowing the bell will ring in a few minutes. I leave NT gladly for home only to meet my family.

Again, I keep this dark secret hidden from them, adding to my sense of loneliness and helplessness. It hurts me to keep it from them. That is a dilem-

ma I wrestle with every day. By the end of the day, I call my only friend whom I have enlightened about my sexuality.

My friend quickly reassures me that I'm not alone and that our conservative area has the problem, not me. I start my homework only to be followed by a night's sleep and another day at NT.

THIS LETTER is to open your eyes to the problem, not to preach to you. We hear the jokes but are not laughing. When I came to this realization about myself, I knew I had to depend on myself.

I'm not sorry or ashamed to be gay, because I've become a stronger person, but I am afraid of the ideas and hatred that are quietly brewing at NT.

I hope as you read this, a few of you, will contemplate your own feelings about homosexuals. As for myself, I started to attend a youth group for kids like myself to get some extra support and reassurance.

WHEN I go to this group, my feelings of loneliness subside and I can talk freely about my sexuality and how it affects me. I've found out that there are lots of teens like myself who are going through the same ordeals that I am.

I ask you to assess your feelings towards homosexuals. Take it from me, the quiet abuse we endure is very painful.

Name Withheld
by request

From the archives: the article below was originally published on Mar. 18, 1999

For gay students, high school usually an insensitive place

by Alec Solotorovsky

Several years ago, Mr. Steve Ham had a troublesome student in his advisory. For four years he was late to advisory, often sneaking in quietly 10 or 15 minutes late. The boy also skipped his kinetic wellness classes frequently and had a bleak, despondent attitude.

Mr. Ham, a New Trier English teacher, followed a typical course in dealing with his troubled advisee: parent phone calls, breakfast clubs and trips to the adviser chair, but nothing worked. It wasn't until two years after the boy's graduation that Mr. Ham learned the source of the boy's trouble. He was gay.

According to Mr. Ham, the boy masked his homosexuality very well, dating girls and maintaining an active social life. But underneath, he frequently felt "threatened" and "miserable," especially in advisory and kinetic wellness.

"It was worst in advisory and PE because he was thrust into all-male situations," said Mr. Ham.

"The kids didn't abuse him, but he wasn't out [of the closet] and he felt very uncomfortable. I look back on this with a great deal of regret, and I think about the number of times and the ways I added to his discomfort."

This story does have a happy ending, though. The student graduated from DePaul and now works in the city. He has also returned to New Trier

several times to talk to sophomore sexuality classes about homosexuality.

"It's good that he was able to come back and talk to the human sexuality classes," said Mr. Ham. "He's helped open kids' eyes to the very private pain some of these kids are feeling."

Six years ago, another gay student came forward to tell of the hidden anguish he and other gay students experience. His story was told in a letter printed in the New Trier News on Feb. 5, 1995.

"You can usually tell by looking at someone if they're of a different race, but you can't often tell if someone's gay just by looking at them."

The letter described many of the same feelings expressed by Mr. Ham's advisee: fear, loneliness and anxiety. The student also said that his problems did not end when he left school. He faced the same issues at home because his family was also unaware of his homosexuality. His letter ended with a plea to students asking them to assess their feelings towards homosexuals and an affirmation that "the quiet abuse [homosexuals] endure is very painful."

If statistics are to be believed, the feelings of these two teens are common to a large number of other New Trier students. Estimates of the number of homosexuals in America run as high as 10%, and at a school of over 3000, there

could be as many as 300 gay students. However, only a minute fraction of New Trier's student body is openly gay.

In an attempt to alleviate their pain and help make New Trier a safer place for all students, several actions have been taken by teachers and students.

Many of these efforts have been made by the Safe Schools Committee. Founded about one year ago, the committee has worked steadily to improve the situation of gays and other minority groups at New Trier.

According to kinetic wellness department chair Bonnie Beach, the Safe Schools Committee was founded in response to the letter received from the former student outlining his painful experiences at New Trier. According to Ms. Beach, the letter was part of a nationwide campaign organized by GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Educators Network. As part of the effort, GLSEN asked all of its members to write back to their high schools and share their experiences with current students and teachers.

Ms. Beach said that the mission of the Safe Schools Committee is to make New Trier a more open and accepting place for students.

The committee is behind the "safty zone" signs posted in many classrooms and is also performing a short play for faculty members, to teach them how to deal with homosexual issues.

According to Ms. Beach, the GLSEN member who wrote back to New Trier was the student body vice

president, a member of the lacrosse team, and a very successful student.

"You can usually tell by looking at someone if they're of a different race, and you can often tell by the way someone's dressed if they're of a different religion," said Mr. Ham, "but you can't often tell if someone's gay just by looking at them."

For this reason, the sufferings of homosexual students often go unnoticed and attacks on gays often go unpunished. Ms. Beach and Mr. Ham both said that they hear the words "fag" and "gay" spoken many times without intervention on the part of teachers. According to Ms. Beach, one of the primary goals of the Safe Schools Committee is to teach faculty members how to "end anti-gay language and hostile words."

Estimates of the number of homosexuals in America run as high as 10%, and at a school of over 3,000, there could be as many as 300 gay students.

There are also several support groups and other gay organizations operating throughout the area. One is Evanston High School's Gay-Straight Alliance. According to the alliance's faculty sponsor, the goal of the group is to promote more tolerance and understanding of gay is-

sues among the student body.

Thanks to the group's efforts, the school library now subscribes to the Advocate, a gay magazine, and several group discussions have been held regarding gay and lesbian issues.

According to NT student activities coordinator Mr. Roger Garfield, a similar club was nearly founded at New Trier last year.

Mr. Garfield said that the two students who organized a gay-lesbian presentation in the library had considered forming a club, but it never materialized.

The door is still open, however, and Mr. Garfield said that New Trier would "certainly welcome any kind of club... dealing with gay and lesbian issues."

Several other area schools have gay-lesbian clubs including Stevenson, Glenbrook North and Glenbrook South.

Mr. Garfield and Mr. Ham both expressed the need for more tolerance and openness on the subject of homosexuality.

"I'm sure many kids are going through the same kind of anguish because we don't have many openly gay kids" said Mr. Ham. "We just need to be more sensitive toward how we treat each other."

Mr. Garfield also suggested that the New Trier community might deal more openly with the problems and issues of gay and lesbian students.

"It's an issue that's in the forefront of our society... and it's an issue that's discussed openly," he said.

"It wouldn't surprise anyone if someone said this is an issue that needs to be discussed on the New Trier campus."