

# Spreading Hope

By Michael Buzzelli  
 Photos by Paul William Kruse

Since 2003, Dreams of Hope, Pittsburgh's only arts-focused lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth organization, has been championing LGBT issues through poetry, dance and spoken word.

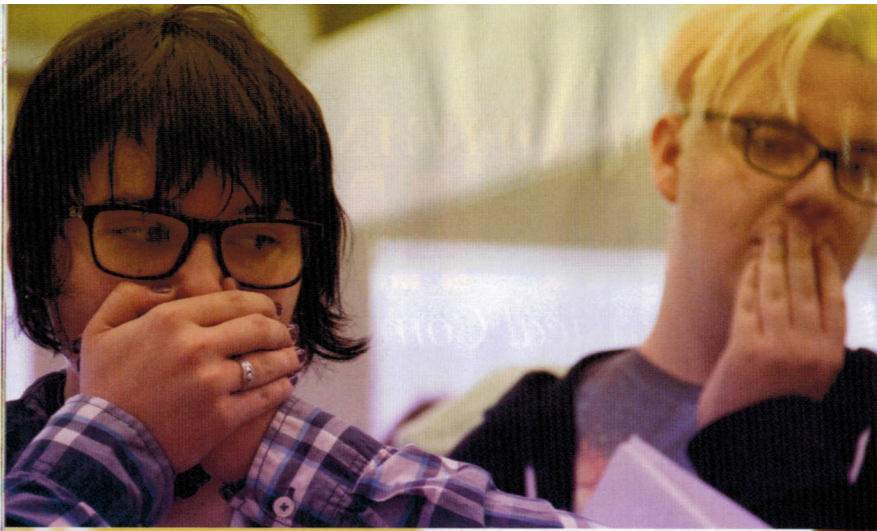
Artistic director Susan Haugh founded the group with a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. Mahatma Ghandi once said, "Be the change that you wish to see in the world," and Susan embodied that guiding principle. She stated, "Through the arts, Dreams of Hope develops LGBT youth leaders who promote social change by educating audiences."

The organization, now in its eleventh year, has been through some dramatic changes lately. Last year, Susan moved to Minnesota with her longtime partner Jane Miller, where she works with GALA Choruses, a national LGBT choral movement. While Susan still guides the creative direction of Dreams of Hope, Adil Mansoor, a theatre maker and educator, now serves as the performance director and mentor.

The teens of Dreams of Hope are mentored in a welcoming environment to grow in confidence, express themselves, and develop as leaders. Their creative contributions educate audiences, build awareness, and increase acceptance. They have written and performed scenes about a variety of issues including coming out and dealing with gay bashing.

Anita Achatz, 20, joined the troupe in October 2011. When Anita came to the group, she was a high school student from Avonworth. Now, she's a theater major at Community College of Allegheny County and is pursuing her educational future at either the University of Pittsburgh or Indiana University of Pennsylvania. She said, "I got a lot of performance experience with Dreams of Hope, but I love that we help educate those who don't really understand [LGBT] issues."

ShaQjuan Tyler, 16, loves being a member of Dreams of Hope. A junior at Pittsburgh CAPA (Creative And Performing Arts school), Tyler said, "It's a great place. I love being here. It's really helped me with my skills as an actor. I feel accepted here."



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Kaylene Kowalski, 18, is a straight ally from the Quaker Valley School District. She is a senior and the president of her school's GSA (Gay Straight Alliance). She and Alexi Pinkham, 16, another Quaker Valley student, heard about Dreams of Hope from their GSA mentor, Kerry McGrath at their school.

Kaylene said, "She was reading a pamphlet and I thought we should check it out. Alexi and I were both in the band so we had some performance background."

Alexi said, "I found out about the GSA when I was in the band and Kaylene came up to me and asked me, 'What did I think about gay marriage?' I realized I had a lot to say about it." She laughed and added, "From there, I joined the GSA and eventually, Dreams of Hope."

In January, the troupe performed a play, "Before Pride" at the Alloy Studios. The show was about the week between the Stonewall incident (June 28- July 4 1969). Inspired by the ensemble's interviews with community leaders in Pittsburgh, historical research, and their own experiences, "Before Pride" asked, "Where have we come from and where are we going?"

The ensemble worked with Adil, and other local artists, Paul Kruse, Monica Stephenson, and Maree ReMalia to develop original text, music, and dance.

Dreams of Hope have also created an educational video that reclaims the disparaging anti-gay remark, "That's So Gay," and bends it from sword to ploughshare. The video has been shown in high school classrooms, libraries and health care centers.

Also in January, the multicultural group held a family-friendly event honoring slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. with free performances at the Kelly-Strayhorn Theater. **EQ**

For more information, visit [dreamsofhope.org](http://dreamsofhope.org)



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