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NEWS RELEASE

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SMYAL ANNOUNCES ANDREW BARNETT AS NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Photo by timcoburnphoto.com

WASHINGTON, DC. – After an extensive search, the Board of Directors of the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL) today announced the appointment of Andrew Barnett as the organization's new Executive Director.

Barnett enters the position with an in-depth understanding of the issues facing DC area lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth, extensive knowledge of the organization, and a passion for empowering and supporting LGBTQ youth in their journeys to adulthood. He first joined SMYAL's staff in 2005 and has been serving as the organization's Acting Executive Director since March 2008.

In conducting its search for an Executive Director, the SMYAL Board sought an individual who would provide visionary and strategic leadership for the organization and translate that vision and strategy into concrete actions to advance the mission.

Betsy Pursell, SMYAL's Board Chair, said, "Andrew Barnett has increasingly demonstrated both great skill in assessing and understanding our young people's needs, and moxie as he has advocated and met those needs. In the rough-and-tumble world of small, community-based non-profits, he performs with intelligence and grace. We believe Andrew will be a transforming leader for SMYAL."

Barnett and the SMYAL Board plan to continue to further stabilize its base of community support, while strengthening the organization's programs for LGBTQ youth and broadening SMYAL's outreach throughout the DC metropolitan region.

Barnett said he is working with the Board to develop a leadership agenda for the beginning of his tenure. Barnett emphasized his commitment to youth leadership "Our community's LGBTQ youth encounter many seemingly insurmountable challenges throughout their adolescence, including bullying and harassment in their schools, rejection and shame from their families, and invisibility and ostracism in their communities. In working with SMYAL, I have seen these youth endure unyielding hardships to achieve independence and contentment with a strong sense of themselves and a commitment to bettering their community. I continue to be humbled and impressed by their resilience and their courage. As I partner with SMYAL's dedicated Board, staff, and volunteers in our important work, I will always place our youth and their needs at the forefront and will look to our youth for inspiration as we fulfill SMYAL's mission."

The SMYAL Board engaged the non-profit executive search firm Transition Guides of Silver Spring to assist with the search and provide consulting and coaching as Barnett begins his new role. With Transition Guides, the SMYAL Search Committee reviewed dozens of well-qualified candidates for this position, held extensive in-person interviews and received impactful feedback from valued community partners.

"We are absolutely convinced that Andrew Barnett is the right choice for SMYAL," Pursell said. "During this process, the outpouring of love, support and ownership that our community has for SMYAL, our mission, and our young people has been awesome. Now I'd ask the community for its support one more time: let's all roll up our sleeves and pitch in to ensure that Andrew and his incredibly capable staff have the resources and support they need to improve the lives of the young people SMYAL serves."

Barnett was a SMYAL volunteer before joining the staff part-time in 2005. Native to the Washington, DC metro area, Barnett became involved in advocating for LGBTQ youth issues as a high school senior at St.

Stephen's and St. Agnes School in Alexandria, VA where he co-founded a Gay-Straight Alliance. Barnett returned to the DC area after receiving his B.A. from The Evergreen State College.

In addition to his work at SMYAL, Barnett has volunteered with DC OUTfront, an Amnesty International group focused on addressing LGBT human rights issues around the world and currently serves as the Co-Chair for the Schools and Youth Committee of Gays and Lesbians Opposing Violence (GLOV).

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About SMYAL

The Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL) is the only Washington, DC metro area service organization solely dedicated to supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth. Founded in 1984, SMYAL is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization. SMYAL's mission is to promote and support self-confident, healthy, productive lives for LGBTIQ youth ages 13-21 as they journey from adolescence into adulthood. To fulfill our mission, we concentrate our commitment and energy on five focus areas: (1) Life Skills & Leadership Development, (2) Counseling & Support, (3) Health & Wellness Education, (4) Safe Social Activities, and (5) Community Outreach and Education.