



empowering LGBTQ youth



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Contact: Hancie Stokes, Communications Manager
Hancie.Stokes@SMYAL.org | 202-567-3153

SMYAL and the Woodhull Freedom Foundation Partner to Increase Youth Voice at the Virtual Sexual Freedom Summit

WASHINGTON, DC- The Woodhull Freedom Foundation, host of the annual Sexual Freedom Summit, is partnering with DC-based LGBTQ youth empowerment organization Supporting and Mentoring Youth Advocates and Leaders (SMYAL) to increase youth-focused and facilitated programming during the 2021 Virtual Summit.

In order to prioritize public health during the COVID-19 pandemic, Woodhull has moved the Sexual Freedom Summit programming online, now hosting workshops throughout the year on Facebook Live and in Zoom gatherings. While the mission of the Summit remains the same, to foster collaboration within and across the sexual freedom movement, a virtual Summit provides new opportunities to enhance networking and community-building in this time of isolation and beyond.

One of the biggest opportunities a virtual summit provides is that of reaching broader, more diverse audiences who may not have been able to attend an in-person conference due to cost, timing, or distance. For many young people, conferences can often be costly and therefore inaccessible, keeping younger voices and activists from fully engaging in these valuable resources. However, much of the current and future work in the sexual freedom movement is being driven by young leaders.

SMYAL and Woodhull have partnered to intentionally highlight LGBTQ+ youth leaders from across the country and provide them with a platform to showcase their work. SMYAL trains and supports LGBTQ youth who are leading activism in their schools, conducting outreach in their communities, and working to create a more equitable world. As part of the partnership with Woodhull, SMYAL will host once-monthly workshops that are designed by young people, facilitated by young people, for young people. By partnering with each other, SMYAL and Woodhull hope to not only include young voices in the sexual freedom movement but center them.

"2021 is the year of youth empowerment here at Woodhull and so we reached out to SMYAL, knowing the wonderful work that they do with LGBTQ+ youth," Woodhull's CEO & President Ricci Levy commented. "It's so important to make space in our movements and at our 'tables' for younger people; to create opportunities for engagement; to mentor and to listen in equal measure. It is youth who will replace the elders in our movements. We're so excited to hear what they have to say!"

"SMYAL is proud to partner with Woodhull Freedom Foundation to bring forth youth-lead and focused programming. Now more than ever, we recognize how important it is to amplify youth voices and leadership in discussions around sexual health and freedom," said Adalphie Johnson, SMYAL's Director of Programs. "Youth-driven leadership is not new, however the past few years have shown us just how impactful and important it is. Youth need and deserve platforms like these."

Sexual freedom is defined as the fundamental human right of all individuals to develop and express their unique sexuality. Encompassed within the sexual freedom movement are: gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, consensual & non-exploitative sexual expression of one's choice, legal and societal recognition of non-traditional relationships, comprehensive sexuality education, sexual and reproductive health, and racial justice.

The first youth-facilitated workshop will be held on Wednesday, March 10th at 7 pm EST. To learn more about the virtual Summit or register for the workshops, visit woodhullfoundation.org/virtual.

The Woodhull Freedom Foundation works at the intersection of sexual freedom and human rights.

SMYAL supports and empowers LGBTQ youth through leadership, advocacy, community support, and housing and clinical services.

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