

Encircling Logan | CEHS

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"When you walk in, you feel the love."

—Riley Welsh

Encircle, a resource center for LGBT youth and families, is raising funds to open an Encircle home in Logan in collaboration with the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at Utah State University.

An event was held in early June to provide an opportunity for the community to learn more about Encircle. Macy Keith works through the USU Inclusion Center to coordinate services for the LGBT community. "Logan has made huge strides to support the rainbow community," Keith said. "We're excited to have more people in this conversation—we look forward to what we can accomplish with more partnerships."

The mission of this nonprofit is to bring together families and the community to help LGBT youth thrive. Suicide is the leading cause of death for youth in Utah, according to the Utah Department of Health, and LGBT youth are three times more likely to die by suicide than their heterosexual peers.

Encircle supporter Riley Welsh says the organization is saving lives.

"Free and low-cost therapy is huge," Welsh said. "Even with the high suicide rate we have in Utah, none of the kids who have taken advantage of the therapy at Encircle have committed suicide."

Encircle has provided direct services to more than 20,000 individuals and subsidized more than 5,000 family and youth therapy sessions.

"We train psychologists, marriage and family therapists, and many other human service providers," said Dr.

Beth Foley, dean of the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services. "It's important for these providers to have the skills to serve this community. Kids need a place they can go to feel loved and safe, and I'm excited to help improve the lives of those who need these services."

Stephenie Larsen, founder and CEO of Encircle, talked about the many LDS bishops, parents, and students who have been a part of loving conversations in Encircle homes throughout Utah.

"They are learning to understand that we are all the same and should never grow up being ashamed of who we are," Larsen said. "Those conversations are spilling over into the community. We are excited to see what we can do with the strength of a university behind us."

Aaron Vera performed at the event, singing a song he wrote called "Brave."

"I'm so grateful there are people here who care, because I didn't know that when I was here and coming out," Vera said. "Thank you so much for being here and for loving our community."

In 2017, Encircle opened its first house in Provo. With an Encircle home successfully opening in Salt Lake City earlier this year and another slated to open within the next year in St. George, Encircle's team is excited to bring these same life-saving services to Cache Valley.

The first Encircle home has been packed every day since it opened in 2017, said Jacob Dunford, Chief Operating Officer. He told the audience, "the people in Provo know about community, and they know how to love. They just needed an organization and a way forward."

One mother of an Encircle client holds a breakfast every Saturday for other parents of LGBT kids in Provo.

"It's like a friendship circle for the parents," says Welsh. "Knowing you're not alone makes a huge difference—and knowing that all you need to do is love your kids."

Parker Franks, another Encircle participant said Encircle provided him with a community.

"My parents have been very supportive of me, but when I got to Encircle, I realized how starved I was for that community; talking to other people who have similar experiences helped me so much because I saw how they got through it," Franks said.

Fine artwork is available for sale in the Sorenson Center on the Logan campus, with proceeds helping to fund the Encircle home in Logan.

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