

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Adam Flanders, I am 20 years old and a current resident of Belfast, Maine. I am writing to you on behalf of my own concerns, as well as the concerns of other youth members and past members (who wish to remain anonymous) of the non-profit organization, *OUT!...As I Want to Be* located in Rockland, Maine. We wish to inform you of the negligence and abuse of *OUT* advisors and adult members. Let me briefly summarize the original purpose of this organization.

*OUT* was the rebirth of *Outright*, a Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning non-profit organization for youth support, affirmation, and advocacy. When *Outright Portland* began demanding monetary compensation for their name (copyright), we were forced to alter ours. In addition, *Rockland Outright* fell into a difficult financial situation after the close of the Coastal AIDS Network (CAN), our primary source of funds. In addition, after several legal disputes, *Portland Outright* closed and has been renewed under the name, "PRYSM." The remaining members of *Rockland Outright* formed *OUT*, a small group consisting of several youth members and a few adult advisors. The policies and ground rules were lazily thrown together as a direct copycat of the former *Portland Outright*.

*OUT* has since been mismanaged in many ways, but I (we) wish to inform you of the apparent negligence of the adult advisors and board members resulting in the emotional distress, abuse, and harm brought to youth members as young as fourteen years old. We can only speak from personal experience, and since I am the only individual willing to reveal my identity, I will begin with my personal experience of *OUT* and I will then summarize the complaints of those individuals who wish to remain anonymous.

The majority of my time with *OUT* was spent at the (public) Lincoln Street Center (LSC) in Rockland, Maine once a week; every Friday night from 7 to 10 PM. However, the location has now moved to the private home of Ed and Virginia Slawson in Rockland, Maine and is now held 3 times a week. During my time at *OUT* meetings, my boyfriend Josh [REDACTED] and I would oftentimes sneak down to the restrooms in the lower part of the building to have sex, beginning when he was 14 and I was 18 – mostly because his father disapproved of our relationship and these meetings were our only opportunity to do this. We did this on many occasions, and several of the other youth were aware of this fact and I wouldn't doubt that similar relations occurred between other members of *OUT* during our nightly meetings from 7 to 10 PM. I bet the advisors were aware of this, too.

There was virtually little to no level of chaperoning, as adult advisors such as Phil Hansen and Lis Clark stressed the importance of a youth-led organization. I recall that we never really knew where maybe half the youth members were at any given time. At least two-thirds of our group smoked avidly and I witnessed adult advisors “bumming” cigarettes to youth members, some of them under the age of 18, and also offering a light to those who already had cigarettes. *OUT* has its own special smoke break, sometimes several a night in which most if not all of the members gathered outside the LSC to smoke, while the few non-smokers (myself included) stood and socialized.

Several members, particularly two friends, Chris and Courtney (also youth members of the board) almost always showed up to our meetings high on marijuana and/or drunk on alcohol. Even worse, I witnessed several advisors drinking too much at such special events as *OUT* barbecues or other social events, with an especial focus on the night of the Question 1 victory: many of the adults were completely drunk, and our advisors, wanting to join the celebration, made the choice to simply bring along *OUT*

youth members. The celebration was held at the home of Michael Mayo in Thomaston and I remember being touched and even groped by one of the older men there (who was clearly intoxicated), and I've heard that other youth had similar experiences. *OUT* advisors were also getting drunk and flirting with youth members. It made the entire situation very uncomfortable, especially at the "Rainbow Potluck," a weekly event inclusive of *OUT* members (still going on), attended primarily by gay and lesbian adults past the age of 40. I, myself and other youth were hit on by some of the adults at the Rainbow Potluck, and I cannot possibly imagine that our advisors were oblivious to this fact. In fact, it was occurring within our own organization.

I once spent the night at one of the advisor's homes (Jeff), with another youth member who was also his nephew (Tyler) up from Florida. Tyler and I engaged in minor sexual contact beneath Jeff's loft that night, though I awoke to find the two of them showering together outside, completely in the nude. In my personal opinion, it is highly inappropriate for an adult advisor in his thirties to be showering nude with a youth member, age 14 at the time. The abuse did not stop there.

Late in the Summer of 2006, the president of *OUT*, Phil Hansen was forcefully required to step down from his position. The other board members held a secret meeting against Phil, and it was reported to me that the reason being was because he had expressed some extreme forms of sexism by completely disregarding what the female members of the board had to say. One of the youth board members (Courtney) reported to me that she left crying due to a sexual remark and personal attack Phil had made against her during one of the board meetings, which have always been held in the private home of Ed and Virginia Slawson. I was not entirely surprised – I recall Phil's stories he told to *OUT* members, affectionate stories from Greek literature about young boys having sexual

relations with older men and open jokes about pedophilia at meetings in his own positive spin on things. This type of sexual abuse and verbal harassment has become a common part of *OUT* and its advisors and youth members – almost like a mutual joke shared by everyone, but making many if not most of the youth very uncomfortable and distressed. It especially concerns me now because the meetings are being held 3 times a week in the private home of Ed and Virginia Slawson.

To summarize some of the experiences of other youth members at *OUT* meetings and events, I will list the following for the purpose of simplicity, and then finish with a final, more personal note.

- Alex ██████, a youth member, continually and repeatedly sexually harassing other youth members with advances and lies about his sexual relations, which according to him, were with every member of *OUT*. Even our coordinator (advisor) Lis Clark joked about how pathetic his constant lies were, and yet when myself and other youth members complained of the sexual harassment, Lis simply scoffed it off as immaturity.
- Another youth member, James ██████ threatened suicide online and blamed it on myself, because he looked up to me and was jealous of my relationship with Josh Lowell. The youth member Chris discovered James' online post while browsing a gay porn hookup site ([www.gaywatch.com](http://www.gaywatch.com)) during an *OUT* meeting. It caused a lot of distress to all of us, knowing he was out on the streets attempting suicide while we are at our meeting.
- Suicide threats and attempts have been a common part of our organization. We once invited a counselor to speak at one of our meetings, and 3 of the members just ran out of the building crying because they couldn't handle the situation.

What most concerned me (and others) was the fact that none of the advisors made any attempt to catch up to them or follow up with them afterward.

- Several of our *OUT* meetings were spent writing letters to seemingly every democrat in Knox County. The youth members were made to write sympathetic letters at the heavy pressure from *OUT*'s new president, J.P. Fecteau. I guess it worked because only a few months ago *OUT* received a \$4,000 donation.

As you can see, there has been a lot of abuse and negligence that has caused more harm to innocent youth than I could possibly begin to describe, and it continues today, and tomorrow, and the next.

My own personal association with *OUT* came to a sudden and violent end when my boyfriend Josh ██████ of 14 months broke up with me. I knew I could find him at the meeting, and when I physically latched onto him and refused to let go, *OUT* advisors were forced to restrain me. I had also brought a knife with me with plans to commit suicide and possibly attempt to murder Josh ██████ along with myself. I was arrested on domestic assault charges. I think this is one example, among many I have already shown, that reveals the inherent dangers an organization like *OUT* creates for vulnerable youth. Even before that, there was a court-issued order against Josh to not have any contact with me, and while Lis Clark (advisor) knew this, she still allowed us to sneak and see one another at *OUT* meetings, helping us lie to Josh's parents on several occasions. Advisors have been known to lie to parents. One 14 year old (Eric); his parents were under the impression he was attending an art class every Friday night.

With my terminated membership, I've had time to reflect on the horrors of this organization and how much influence it has on the Rockland community and beyond –

especially impressionable youth – youth who are encouraged by *OUT* advisors to disobey their parents and develop their GLB or T orientation. *OUT* hands out condoms and lubricant like candy. Being the web designer and owning exclusive rights to all photos and code, I, being permanently exiled from the organization I brought up, made the obvious, perhaps bitter choice to take the site with me. I threatened legal suit if they did not remove all web content from the URL [www.outasiwanttobe.org](http://www.outasiwanttobe.org).

I am writing to you because I fear for the well-being of *OUT* youth members, especially now that meetings are being held 3 times more often and now in a private home rather than a public facility. It is my hope that the Bureau of Health will do everything in their power to seriously investigate this seemingly innocent organization that has such a dark past full of negligence, irresponsibility, sexual harassment, abuse, and ultimately emotional harm that could leave permanent scars in the lives of many vulnerable youth in Maine, or even destroy their lives completely. It makes me wonder, what horrendous acts will occur this week, or the next, or in the many months to come? More importantly, what will the BoH and the Rockland community do to make sure these destructive adult “advisors” are no longer allowed to have influence on these poor youth?

I appreciate your time and hope you will consider my words seriously with the utmost concern for the welfare of Maine’s children.

Sincerely,

Adam Flanders

*Adam Flanders*  
*Jan. 13, 2007*