Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services:
About our Programs for Sexual and Gender Minority Youth

What is Camp fYrefly?

Camp fYrefly (www.CampfYrefly.ca) is a 4-day residential style summer leadership retreat for sexual and gender minority youth who variously identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-identified, two-spirited, queer, and allied. It focuses on building and nurturing their leadership potential and personal resiliency in an effort to help them become agents for positive social change in their schools, families, faith groups, and communities. To our knowledge, Camp fYrefly is the largest youth leadership camp of its kind in Canada and the only one in the world affiliated with a major research university, which ensures for research-informed programming, sound pedagogical principles, and strong fiscal management. All Camp fYrefly programming is guided by input from youth and facilitated by trained professionals and youth workers in collaboration with a team of artists, dramatists, and community and youth leaders. The Camp, employing an arts-based educational philosophy, is jam-packed with dance, drama, music, writing, visual art, empowerment and reflection exercises, anti-oppression work, personal growth opportunities, healthy socialization, and in-depth learning activities about specific youth topics and social issues. In sum, pedagogy at Camp fYrefly focuses on four key areas: leadership, individual development, socialization, and resiliency.

Why does Camp fYrefly exist?

Camp fYrefly, now in its 9th year, exists because caring adults believe that all youth are entitled to a world that embraces diversity rather than fearing it. For four days each year, the Camp creates that world for sexual and gender minority youth, a world that lives out the fYrefly acronym, which stands for fostering, Youth, resiliency, energy, fun, leadership, yeah! Camp fYrefly’s philosophy and programming emphasize a by-youth-for-youth approach where older youth and adult facilitators mentor and help to support younger youth. All youth attending the Camp are invited to provide feedback through Camp evaluations and wrap-up meetings. Their feedback helps organizers improve Camp programming and services.

What are the goals of Camp fYrefly?

Five goals comprise the framework that guides the development and delivery of Camp fYrefly programming so youth can grow into resilience as happy and healthy individuals: 1) creating a socially just and inclusive community; 2) building resiliency and youth leadership capacity; 3) empowering youth to address bullying, harassment, hate crimes, and knowing their rights; 4) learning through art, music, writing, performing arts, and games, and 5) self, social, and spiritual development.
Who operates Camp fYrefly?

Dr. André P. Grace and Dr. Kristopher Wells, educators in the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, founded and direct Camp fYrefly as a university-community educational outreach project that focuses on the needs of sexual and gender minority youth. The first annual Alberta Camp was held in Edmonton in 2004. It operates under the auspices of the University of Alberta. The University provides insurance and other in-kind supports as well as legal supports for working with youth, especially vulnerable sexual and gender minority youth who have not yet reached the age of majority. The Camp has expanded to Saskatchewan where it alternates between the province’s two major cities. The first Camp was held in Saskatoon in 2009, with the second in Regina in 2010. In Saskatchewan the University of Alberta partners with the University of Regina to run Camps there.

Who supports Camp fYrefly?

Camp fYrefly is supported by the University of Alberta, University of Regina, Canadian Teachers’ Federation, Alberta Teachers’ Association, Government of Alberta, City of Edmonton, Edmonton Police Service, Edmonton Public Teachers’ Local, Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities, Alberta’s Promise, TELUS, ATB Financial, and PFLAG Canada. In addition to these organizations, Camp fYrefly is also supported by hundreds of individual donors from across Canada.

Camp organizers and adult volunteers include teachers, social workers, nurses, psychologists, clergy, elders from Aboriginal communities, police officers, and other caring professionals who work extensively with sexual and gender minority campers. These professionals have substantial first-hand experience in recognizing how challenging adolescence can be for all youth, especially youth who are coming out and coming-to-terms with differences in sexual orientation and gender identity. Their collective goal is to help empower Camp participants to envision a healthy and happy future free from fear, abuse, and discrimination. The Camp enables youth participants to develop a resiliency network of friends, trusted adults, community resources, and leadership strategies. In sum, the work with youth at Camp fYrefly is an investment in their futures, which is an investment in their communities.

Why is it important to share information about Camp fYrefly with parents/guardians, caring professionals, and other caring adults?

Camp fYrefly is a safe social learning space for sexual and gender minority youth. Camp programming is informed by federally funded research conducted at the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services. For the past several years, this research has investigated how sexual and gender minority youth grow into resilience by building the personal, social, spiritual, and environmental assets needed to develop the dexterity to survive and thrive. At Camp youth learn about social, cultural, spiritual and other aspects of living that can improve their comprehensive health. Research is applied to Camp programming to help these youth to develop senses of self-worth and hope; belongingness and dependable attachments; and strategies for enhancing safety and security in their everyday lives. Youth consider how to grow into resilience by building supports and engaging in meaningful interactions at school and in families, faith groups, and the larger community. Since youth have an array of personal characteristics, they learn how their experiences of adversity can be complicated and impacted by other defining characteristics including Aboriginality, ethnocultural location, ability, class, age, geographical location, and living context (such as family, group home, or street environments).

In essence, Camp fYrefly is a university-community based program run like any K-12 school program, field trip, or event. As professional educators, we take our fiduciary responsibilities very seriously and employ the same kinds of rules, behavioural expectations, and adult supervision as any other youth or school-related program. For example, all youth under the age
of majority – that is, under 18 years of age – are required to obtain parental/guardian consent to attend, and all youth must sign a participant agreement, which clearly outlines all Camp rules and expectations.

Camp fYrefly is a unique and powerful experience. More than 500 youth have participated in Camp fYrefly’s award-winning programming. As many of these youth tell us, Camp fYrefly not only changes lives, it also saves them.

For further information, please contact:

**Camp fYrefly**
Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services
7-104 Education North Building | Faculty of Education | University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta, CANADA | T6G 2G5
fYrefly@ualberta.ca
780-492-4909