



Gay and Lesbian Switchboard of Philadelphia records, mid 1970s-1998 : Ms.Coll.47

Finding aid prepared by John Anderies on April 21, 2017

PDF produced on July 17, 2019

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Summary Information

Repository:	John J. Wilcox, Jr. LGBT Archives, William Way LGBT Community Center
Title:	Gay and Lesbian Switchboard of Philadelphia records
ID:	Ms.Coll.47
Date [inclusive]:	mid 1970s-1998
Physical Description:	2.3 Linear feet (4 document boxes, 2 flat boxes, 1 volume)
Language of the Material:	English
Abstract:	The Gay and Lesbian Switchboard of Philadelphia operated at a series of locations in the city from 1973 to 1998. It aimed to provide information, counseling, and referrals to the gay and lesbian community via a call-in phone line. The Switchboard records are comprised of a range of business-related organizational materials dating from the mid 1970s through the late 1990s.

Preferred Citation

Gay and Lesbian Switchboard of Philadelphia records, mid 1970s-1998, Ms. Coll. 47, John J. Wilcox, Jr. LGBT Archives, William Way LGBT Community Center, Philadelphia, PA.

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Biographical / Historical

The Gay Switchboard, as it was originally named, got its start in 1972 in the Green Street apartment of founder Keith Clark (1943-2003). After a couple of moves with Clark to other apartments, the Switchboard set up shop at 60 North Third Street, a building owned by the Society of Friends, in 1973. This location came to house not only the Switchboard but also the Gay Coffeehouse and the Eromin Center, an organization offering mental health services to sexual minorities. The Switchboard moved with Eromin to 1735 Naudain Street in 1974. With the opening of the Gay Community Center of Philadelphia (predecessor of William Way LGBT Community Center) in 1976, the Gay Switchboard followed to the Center's first home at 326 Kater Street (1976-1981) and its second home at 222 South Camac Street (1982-1983). When the Center closed for a number of years, the Switchboard operated for a time in the offices of the Philadelphia Community Health Alternatives at 1129 Spruce Street and at Dignity House in the Oddfellows Building at 252 South 12th Street. With the re-opening of the

Community Center as Penguin Place in 1990, the Switchboard moved to 201 South Camac Street. The Switchboard was one of the William Way LGBT Community Center's first tenants in its present building at 1315 Spruce Street, and ceased operations in 1998.

A Switchboard staff manual ca. 1976 gives the following early history of the organization:

In December of 1972, a group of people associated with Gay Activists Alliance decided to start a Switchboard. Not knowing quite what to expect, they had meetings, Consciousness Raising sessions, and lectures by experts in counseling, suicide, law, and Venereal Disease.

The phone was installed, and we began operations on February 19, 1973. We started out with less than a dozen volunteers and a card file with about twenty cards. These first volunteers had their real training program while "on the job.

Space had been obtained to move the Switchboard from its current location in someone's apartment to a building owned by the Society of Friends. By this time, there were plans on the way to become the Gay Health Consortium. It would include a professional and paraprofessional counseling center, Switchboard, and social center for Gay people. The GHC incorporated as the Eromin Center, Inc., and moved along with the Switchboard, leaving behind a Gay Coffeehouse which would eventually become the Gay Community Center of Phila., Inc.

The Gay Switchboard at this time was under the control of the Eromin Center. The Director of the Switchboard was a paid staff member of Eromin. The resignation of the Switchboard Director forced the Switchboard volunteers to meet to decide the future of the Switchboard. It was decided to become an autonomous democratic organization. It was also decided to move to the future (and at this time homeless) Gay Community Center.

On March 19, 1976, the Gay Switchboard moved and changed its phone number to 928-1919. On moving day, we had an office with four walls, no door, and no electricity. We had to rough it for a few weeks until the office was finished. We are still changing and will continue to do so to offer the best services we can.

Throughout the years, the Switchboard consistently listed its services as information, counseling, and referrals. The hours of availability changed some over the years, but generally was staffed most days of the week in the evenings, typically 6 pm or 7 pm to 11 pm or midnight. Volunteers went through 5-6 training sessions before staffing the phone line on their own. Multiple volunteers would often work on the same night suggesting a multi-line phone was used to accept more than one call at a time. The Switchboard used a telephone answering machine when not staffing the phone and sometimes used a speaker phone and teletypewriter (TTY)/telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD).

Management of the Switchboard was vested in an Executive Board, consisting of volunteers elected to office for one-year terms by members of the Switchboard. The Board included an Executive Director, Director of Recruiting and Training, Director of Scheduling and Communications, Director of Records and Statistics (Treasurer), Director of Information and Resources, and Director of Publicity.

The Switchboard did not charge a fee for its services, but relied on fundraising through 50-50 lotteries, skating parties, bar nights, donations at the door of area bars, and direct contributions. It also hosted for some time an annual awards presentation and benefit auction at the bar DCA Club.

In 1984, the Switchboard gave rough statistics of its calls in *Au Courant* newspaper. Calls were proportioned at 45% informational, 35% counseling, and 25% referrals (medical, legal, and business); 80% of the callers were male and 20% were female; callers identified as 60% white, 30% black, and 10% hispanic and others; the age of the callers ranged from 12 to 82 years old; 10% of calls were from out of town, with 75% from the City of Philadelphia, and 25% from surrounding areas.

Other hotlines and switchboards in the area for the gay and lesbian community included a Bisexual Switchboard, the Lesbian Hotline of Philadelphia, the Gay and Lesbian Peer Counseling Hotline, the Philadelphia Lesbian and Gay Task Force Violence and Discrimination Hotline, the Philadelphia AIDS Task Force Hotline, the Philadelphia Parents of Gays Hotline, and a Hustler Hotline. No other area hotlines were as long lasting as the Gay Switchboard of Philadelphia, which became the Gay and Lesbian Switchboard of Philadelphia in 1993 after the closing of the Lesbian Hotline of Philadelphia.

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Scope and Contents

The Gay and Lesbian Switchboard of Philadelphia records are comprised of a range of business-related organizational materials dating from the mid 1970s through the late 1990s. These include bylaws and articles of incorporation, correspondence and internal memos, meeting agendas and minutes. The most comprehensive materials are staff lists (1984-1996), staff work schedules (1984-1985, 1996), sign-in sheets (1985-1995), staff logbooks (1986-1995), and call sheets (1992-1996). The call sheets are particularly rich in data, as each call was logged with its date and time, a code indicating the type of call, as well as a description of the call and the resources provided to the caller. Name and phone number of the caller was not recorded, presumably to assure the caller's privacy.

Among the earliest of the records which survive are two Victor Book Visible index card directories which were used to refer callers to bars, businesses, and service organizations in the Philadelphia area. The earliest datable card, which was later reused by writing on its backside, is for the Library of the Gay Community Center of Philadelphia on Kater Street, which was located there from 1976 until 1981. The latest date on the cards is from late 1984, giving a probable date range of late 1970s to 1984. Other early materials include the undated staff manual quoted in the History note of this finding aid, which is probably from 1976, and the remains of two undated staff resource directories. These materials are especially valuable in their documentation of contemporaneous LGBT resources in the Philadelphia area.

Besides the organization's own resource directories there are also some from other organizations including the Renaissance Education Association (transgender information), the American Red Cross and the AIDS Coalition of Southwest New Jersey (both on HIV/AIDS information), as well as Bell Atlantic and the Donelley Directory (both on human services). A printout of the Volunteer Handbook for the Gay / Lesbian Switchboard of State College is also in the collection. Whether these materials were used in conjunction with the Switchboard's own resources is unclear.

Fliers, pamphlets, and other promotional material received by the Switchboard help document a number of events, organizations, professional services that might have been referenced in helping callers.

Material objects of note include awards presented to the organization as well as the Switchboard's answering machine, speaker phone, and teletypewriter (TTY)/telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD).

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research use.

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

Abandoned property, 1998

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Related Materials

Related Materials

At New York Public Library: Gay Switchboard of New York records, 1972-1983, MssCol 1129

At Michigan State University Libraries: Greater Lansing Lesbian/Gay Hotline archives, MSS 276 large

At Temple University Libraries Special Collections Research Center: Eromin Center (Philadelphia, Pa.) Records, 1972-1984, Acc. 573

At John J. Wilcox, Jr. Archives, William Way LGBT Community Center: Gay Switchboard of Philadelphia file in William Way LGBT Community Center ephemera files, 1972-present, Ms. Coll. 35

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Controlled Access Headings

- Business records
- Business referrals
- Call centers -- Statistics
- Coming out (Sexual orientation)
- Correspondence
- Counseling
- Gay bars
- Gay community
- Gay men
- Handbooks and manuals
- Hotlines (Counseling)
- Information services
- Lesbians
- Logbooks
- Mental health
- Philadelphia (Pa.)
- Sexual minorities
- Telephone -- Equipment and supplies
- Gay and Lesbian Switchboard of Philadelphia (Pa.)

Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances	
Bylaws and organizational description, 1986, undated	Box 1	Folder 1
Incorporation, tax exemption and non-profit status, 1984, 1992, undated	Box 1	Folder 2
Stationery and blank forms, undated	Box 1	Folder 3
Correspondence, 1985-1998, undated	Box 1	Folder 4

Internal memos, 1985-1997, undated	Box 1	Folder 5
Meeting agendas and minutes, 1985-1997, undated	Box 1	Folder 6
Miscellaneous notes, undated	Box 1	Folder 7
Bills and receipts, 1989-1998, undated	Box 1	Folder 8
Advertising, undated	Box 1	Folder 9
Press releases, 1993, 1995	Box 1	Folder 10
Out Downtown (switchboard newsletter), 1996 March-April	Box 1	Folder 11
Grant applications, 1993, undated	Box 1	Folder 12
Awards (Philadelphia Center City Festival, Dignity Community Service Award), 1981, 1983	Box 1	Folder 13
Outstanding Community Service Award from STEPS, 1980	Box 5	
Philadelphia Gay News, Lambda Awards, 1986, 1991	Box 5	
National Gay and Lesbian Hotline Conference, 1996-1997	Box 1	Folder 14
Staff lists, 1984-1996, undated	Box 1	Folder 15
Staff manual, undated	Box 1	Folder 16
Policies and procedures, 1993, 1997, undated	Box 1	Folder 17
Training procedures, undated	Box 1	Folder 18
Equipment manuals, undated	Box 1	Folder 19
Gay and Lesbian National Hotline, New Volunteer Orientation Handbook, 1996	Box 1	Folder 20
Volunteer Handbook for the Gay / Lesbian Switchboard of State College, 3rd. ed., 1987	Box 1	Folder 21
"How to Handle Hotline: Some Helpful Hints for Dealing with a Variety of Clients," Mental Health, 1994 Fall	Box 1	Folder 22
Staff resource directory, undated	Box 2	Folder 1
Staff resource directory, undated	Box 2	Folder 2
Miscellaneous pages from staff resource directory, undated	Box 2	Folder 3
Victor Book Visible index card directory (bars and services organizations), late 1970s-1984	Volume 1	
Victor Book Visible index card directory (topics: "accountants" to "venereal diseases"), late 1970s-1984	Box 5	
The Renaissance Education Association, Background Papers on transgender topics, 1989	Box 2	Folder 4
American Red Cross, Philadelphia Area AIDS Resource Directory, 1989	Box 2	Folder 5

Bell Atlantic Guide to Human Services and Donelley Directory of Human Services, 1992, 1998	Box 2	Folder 6
AIDS Coalition of Southwest New Jersey, AIDS Services Resource Guide, 1993-1994	Box 2	Folder 7
Reference Source forms, 1991-1992	Box 2	Folder 8
Advertising received for events, organizations, professional services, etc., 1985-1997, undated	Box 2	Folder 9
Staff work schedules, 1996, undated	Box 2	Folder 10
Bi-weekly schedule, 1984	Box 2	Folder 11
Bi-weekly schedule, 1985	Box 2	Folder 12
Sign-in sheets, 1985	Box 3	Folder 1
Sign-in sheets, 1986	Box 3	Folder 2
Sign-in sheets, 1987	Box 3	Folder 3
Sign-in sheets, 1988	Box 3	Folder 4
Sign-in sheets, 1990	Box 3	Folder 5
Sign-in sheets, 1993-1995	Box 3	Folder 6
Staff logbook, 1986-1987	Box 3	Folder 7
Staff logbook, 1987-1990	Box 3	Folder 8
Staff logbook, 1991-1995	Box 3	Folder 9
Call statistics, 1984-1985, undated	Box 3	Folder 10
Call sheets, 1992	Box 3	Folder 11
Call sheets, 1993 January-July	Box 4	Folder 1
Call sheets, 1993 August-December	Box 4	Folder 2
Call sheets, 1994	Box 4	Folder 3
Call sheets, 1995	Box 4	Folder 4
Call sheets, 1996 January-June	Box 4	Folder 5
Call sheets, 1996 July-December	Box 4	Folder 6
Bell Phones Answermate telephone answering machine, with outgoing and incoming cassette tapes, undated	Box 6	
Duophone 102, electronic telephone amplifier system, undated	Box 5	
Krown Research PortaView Jr. Model 32, teletypewriter (TTY)/telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD), undated	Box 6	