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**Title:** LGBT Oral History: LGBT Center History group interview with Louie Marven, Ben Dunlap, Marlene Kanuck, Elizabeth (Bebe) Mullaugh

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**Interviewee: Louie Marven, Ben Dunlap, Marlene Kanuck, Elizabeth (Bebe) Mullaugh**

Interviewer: Barry Loveland, Bill Burton

Date: September 16, 2017

Place: Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

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**Abstract:**

The Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) Center of Central PA (Harrisburg) began to form in the late 90s. To receive fundraising through the National Lesbian and Gay Community Funding Partnership of New York, the founding group was led approximately 600 need-based assessment surveys around Central Pennsylvania. The study covered the eight-county region of Central Pennsylvania. In 1999, the group received a matching grant from the foundation – one out of the two states in the country to get that funding. From this funding, the LGBT group in Harrisburg was able to gain a community center. In this interview, Louie Marven, Ben Dunlap, Marlene Kanuck and Elizabeth Mullaugh speak on their experiences as board members of the LGBT Center in Harrisburg and each describe the functions and communal efforts made by the group, including starting Gay-Straight Alliances in Pennsylvania high schools.

**Barry Loveland:** Well, welcome. I'm Barry Loveland with the LGBT Center Mystery Project and we're here today, Saturday September 16<sup>th</sup> at the LGBT Center doing a group interview on history of the LGBT Center. And we're going to be interviewing four individuals and then I'm gonna ask to say your full name and your – and spell your full name so that we have that for the transcript. And then after that, after you do that, if you would say whether or not we have your permission to record the interview today. So, let's start with Ben on this side.

**Ben Dunlap:** Sure. Ben Dunlap, D-U-N-L-A-P, and B-E-N [laughs]. And yes you have my permission to record this today as long as I'm not gushing blood [laughs].

**Marlene Kanuck:** Marlene Kanuck. M-A-R-L-E-N-E, pronounced Marlene, K-A-N-U-C-K, not Kanuck (ph), Kannick (ph) [laughs]. And yes, you have my permission.

**Louie Marven:** Louie Marven. L-O-U-I-E, Marven M-A-R-V-E-N. And yes, you have my permission to record.

**Elizabeth Mullaugh:** Elizabeth Mullaugh. M-U-L-L-A-U-G-H, although everyone calls me Bebe. And you have my permission to record.

**BL:** In addition to myself, we have Bill Burton who's going to be also conducting the interview with me. As well as Kathy (ph) McCormick (ph), who is doing our video today. We thank all of you for coming. So just to get started, I guess, we basically want you to go through the entire sort of process of how the concept of the center was developed, and what was the impetus for like, you know doing – doing that, and getting some kind of community activity going. So, why don't we start – I guess, maybe Ben, you probably have the longest history with it. Maybe you could talk a little bit about how the whole thing got started. What was the impetus for actually what you've been thinking about this summer?

**BD:** Well, it really had it's initial impetus in the fundraising that Tish Frederick started back in the late 90s. And she was then in Harrisburg, and attorney here in town and she had the idea of doing a fundraiser for the gay community, for the switchboard at that time for other LGBT groups. And she had first one at Rolloughs (ph) in Mechanicsburg, it was very successful. The community got together, and it as a fun time and it really was a.. first time here, that I was in Harrisburg – I've been here for a few years – there really seemed to be a sense of community. And this was – we raised several – I forgot how many exactly it was – but several thousand dollars anyway from various organizations in town. We did that for a couple of years. And Candy Free (ph), who was then with what is now the foundation for enhancing communities – was then a greater Harrisburg foundation, came to me one day and said “Hey I heard about this fundraising you're doing and we have the opportunity to raise \$200,000 for the LGBT community here in town through this group called the National Lesbian and Gay Community Funding Partnership out of New York.” And it had to be done through community fund foundations, and what we had to do was if we raised \$100,000, we got another \$100,000 and... so, I thought it was an intriguing idea. And so we had this vehicle to do it, (\_\_\_\_?) which is why she came to me. And so we initiated that process. And one of the requirements –

**Bill Burton:** So F.A.B. stands for again?

**BD:** Full Achievement Benefit. And it was also to honor people in the Gay and Lesbian community. I think one of the first, I think the first one, if I'm not mistaken, is Barry Stockfull (ph), who was honored. And if you remember he was the –

**EM:** I was at that, (\_\_\_\_?)

**BD:** Oh you were? That's great.

**EM:** Yup.

**BD:** Wasn't that great fun?

**EM:** It was – it was great fun, that was a terrific event.

**BD:** And am I correct was it Barry Stockfull (ph)?

**EM:** I – I think that's right, I remember Candace Daymer (ph) being at one of them.

**BD:** She was definitely at one. I'm not sure whether...

**MK:** (\_\_\_?) I heard the second one...

**EM:** Was that the second one? Maybe that was the second one. But it was also (\_\_\_?)

**BD:** I think the Roulloughs was only once because they tore it down (\_\_\_?). But, in any of that he [Barry Stockfull ?] was the Episcopal priest who—his hierarchy, the deacon or whatever above him, stood up for it when it was, when he came out. And it was a big national story, and he [Barry Stockfull ?] was at the center of that. And he was honored. He lived up in Northeastern PA, up around Louisburg, I believe. And anyway, so... in doing this, one of the requirements of the NGLCFP (National Lesbian Gay Community Funding Partnership) was that we do a needs-assessment (ph). And we hired the gearing (ph) group in Rancun (ph) Associates and they got involved. I think the National needs-assessment was the cultural partnerships – is that what it was called?

**LM:** Institute for Cultural Partnership.

**EM:** Right.

**BD:** Institute! For cultural partnership.

**MK:** Institute, right.

**BD:** And, we have various, we did about 630 – they put together surveys, we handed those out in the eight county area that we were going to serve. And since we were working with the foundation, we pretty much had our—their footprint became our footprint. You know the eight

county area. And service area. So we got most of the responses were from Dolphin County but there were a fair number from Cumberland and Lancaster Counties too.

**BB:** Who did you survey? Gay people? Gay and lesbian people?

**BD:** Primarily. I think it was about 90%. I think there was about 6% straight allies and there were mainly gays and lesbians. And we tried to have a mix of people with the really (\_\_\_?) got people involved who can go into the minority communities, who would you know, seek out elders, the youth. I think the Common Roads was in existence, it just started.

**MK:** Common Roads probably was in existence. Yeah.

**BD:** Yeah. And so we talked to youth, lesbians...

**BB:** Was it called Common Roads then or was it under the old name?

**LM:** 1983 it was Beglia (ph)

**BD:** Yes it was Beglia (ph) because that was mentioned in the report.

**BL:** So it wasn't – it was the old name.

**BD:** Yeah. So anyway, we did this and there were focus groups. The focus groups were organizations and minorities and lesbians and youth and ... the thing that struck me when we put this together is across the board people didn't necessarily say the greatest deed, but every group said they really thought we needed a community center. That we needed some way to bring together the community.

**MK:** When was the focus group at St. Michaels? Because –

**BD:** It is about year 2000, that's when we're done.

**MK:** Okay, so – alright.

**BD:** That's the timeframe.

**BB:** Yeah, what years are we talking about?

**BD:** Yeah, the first F.A.B was in the late 90s, I think 97 or so, yeah and then later is when Candy Free came to me, maybe 99' or so. And then we applied and were awarded. We were, at the time, one of the only two communities in the country to get an award for this matching grant. I think the others, Indianapolis or somewhere...

**BB:** Indianapolis?

**BD:** Perhaps. I didn't know all of that but we were only two cities that got it. They weren't doing a lot each year. And so anyway, we got that. We started the process, did the needs-assessment, and the other thing we needed to do to gear up, and that was in year 2000. I think the report came out in 2001 if I'm not mistaken. And that was very interesting because we had you know, sessions, and as I said I'd go to bars and hand them out -- the surveys and so forth -- the focus groups, very interesting. So, once we saw this need that there was group within the foundation; the gay and lesbian community funding...wait, what as it called?

**LM:** E.G.A.L.

**BD:** E.G.A.L! Thank you. E.G.A.L. within the foundation.

**EM:** Equity for Gays and Lesbians.

**BD:** Yes, equity for gays and lesbians.

**EM:** For equity.

**BD:** Equity being the play-on-words. You know. [chuckles] And for money, and for equality.

**BB:** What was the acronym? E.G.A.L?

**EM:** E.G.A.L. Equity for Gays and Lesbians Fund.

**BD:** Correct.

**EM:** It was a fund within the community foundation so, money raised toward accumulated there

—

**BB:** That was already existed?

**BD:** No, not really. It came about through this effort.

**BB:** Okay.

**BD:** And there was a committee, that'd oversee this. It became a project for what was then the greater Harrisburg Foundation. And so they were very supportive. The whole way through, very supportive. And so, the committee, when we saw this needs-assessment, we thought: Okay, one of the things we need to do with the money that we raise is you know, help the community center get started. And that's when we then put together community groups. We had sessions that were mainly up at NCC, right? The initial sessions?

**MK:** I don't know, the one that I ended up going to was the one at St. Michaels.

**BD:** Was that the focus group?

**MK:** Yeah, that was the focus group.

**BD:** Okay, so that was prior. That was for the needs-assessment.

**MK:** Right. And that was when we had people, we had newsprint, and everybody was writing about what we needed in a community center. Because that was – it actually, when it initially started, it was kinda going all over the place -- what we needed -- but the it came around to we need a community center. And then, the next thing was that from there: well, who's going to lead the group? That's where I came in. Although I had already been very involved with Common Roads, with Carol Ressler (ph), who was the executive director. And it was Ted, who I was working for the Department of Ed and Safe Schools; and it was Ted who told Carol to get a hold of me, that I might be able to come up with some money for Common Roads. And that's how I

got involved. Then, I heard about the focus group and then we went to the – we had a focus group and then it was...they needed people to be the steering committee.

**BD:** Yeah, that was a little bit down the road.

**MK:** That was down the road, okay. So, keep going where you are.

**BD:** [laughs] Sure.

**MK:** Because I am jumping ahead. Because I moved to Harrisburg in 97', so that's when I started getting involved with Common Roads. That's when I met – I don't think I met her beforehand, but that's when I met Sharon.

**BD:** Is that Sharon Potter?

**MK:** Yeah, Potter.

**BD:** But anyway, the way to sort of focus this was – you know and this is where the Deering (ph) group primarily came in, that there were to put together a report, like what does this community center look like? What is it going to be? How will this best serve the community? And, and I personally thought this was very important. I pushed very hard to have this kind of study. Because prior to moving to Harrisburg and going to law school, I lived up in Allentown (ph) for six years in the mid-80s. And there, I was a part of an effort there to start a community center. And it was kind of done – I mean great intentions, everybody, really good intentions – but it was done kind of on a shoestring. We had a space, it was all volunteers, and it fell apart. And there were very bad feelings. And I think it was 20 years before another one got started up there. And so I thought – two things I thought, that you can't do just a volunteered job that pays nothing and you know you have to plan. We can't just come in and just kind of wing it. So, this was to be the plan. And you know we had these sessions, if I'm not mistaken I think they were all MCC (ph?).

**EM:** I was not at any of those sessions.

**BD:** No, not that time. And very well run and people got together, we sort of hashed out. We got in the, you know, little groups and talked about what we're doing. And we tried very hard to help mix some people and I think we were very successful in getting youth involved and it was kind of a struggle to get the minority community involved. We did try, but it was kind of a struggle. And women, there was a good representation from women.

**BL:** Why was it a struggle with the minorities?

**MK:** I believe because there's a stigma in the minority community, particularly in the African-American community, to be gay. And that's – they're – I – believe that's why, because it's very influenced by their religious beliefs. And I think it's just hard for people. Particularly in an area that's small-townish, to be out in the African-American community. It's much different in Philadelphia, I think. But here, it's still a struggle sometimes to get minority people to come out for various activities. I think that that's—kind of like, it's been that way.

**EM:** I think that is a microcosm of larger issues of race relations in Central Pennsylvania.

**MK:** Okay.

**EM:** I mean, you could say that about any sort of subset of folks in this region. It's—its difficult. It's not so much that there's antagonism like other cities I've lived in but there just aren't...there's not a lot of --

**LM:** Segregation.

**EM:** Yes, there's absolutely a history of segregation and that plays out geographically in the city, and people just don't do things in the same space.

**BD:** I agree with all of that. And I think that particularly it was even more pronounced XVII years ago. And that I remember, there was Eric Sulvy (ph), who was involved, he was one of the few minority people involved in the effort. He'd try to get some of his friends involved. And he just said that didn't – either they didn't, were comfortable, even though it was just – it was a very safe space, they were comfortable coming. Or, they thought that “oh it's just a bunch of white people and they're not going to listen to us”.

**BL:** It's another white, gay organization...

**BD:** There was that. So, I think there was some of that. I mean I didn't know the people to reach out to, or I would have but...and—and, later...who was Rosemary's predecessor? At the foundation? She went to Howard. She was African-American and she was very much...yeah, she very much tried also and she was great. And then Rosemary Brown of course was African-

American, she was great too. But that was a struggle, that part. But we did try, we did get enough to have a focus group. I think there was only four or something like that, but we did have minority focus groups. But anyway so we wanted to, after they identified the need, we wanted to have a center that would be inclusive and it would meet the various needs, and that's what we were working very hard to do in this rapport. And then, out of that came reports and then we had the group, the gala group, was kinda tasked. Okay, what's the next step? And the next step was to put together a board of directors. That's when Elaine, Alli (ph) and Ted, we were kind of the –

**MK:** (\_\_\_\_?)

**BD:** Well, he was later too. We were like the executive, we were the four that –

**MK:** Not them. I always thought...I didn't remember that David didn't come in at the very beginning.

**BD:** Well he was pretty close to the beginning. It was the four of us –

**MK:** Yeah.

**BD:** Who were like the, the task force, I guess you could call us. And we were you know, okay, who could we get for the board of directors? Who can we, how do we do this? How do we set this up and take it to the next step? And so that's what we did and we asked people. And I think you [EM] weren't at the very beginning, you were close to the beginning.

**MK:** So this – this, to me, I remember that when as, again, going back to that meeting at St. Michaels, because that's when we were talking about the center. And as I said, I mean (\_\_\_?) was a focus group there too because we were asking people's opinions and then, and then, the folks...and that's when we got volunteers...well, you guys got volunteers and that's when I stepped in. Because I stepped in and said "excuse me guys, we need a woman in here" [laughs]. Excuse me, there's no...if you're gonna need...'cause it all – it was decided that it was going to be – and there was some discussion there – "GLBT", "LGBT", and so I kinda said, we got down to LGBT and then I said "I think you need a woman on that task force if it's really gonna represent lesbians too." So, that's when we started meeting. Over at the North Café.

**BD:** Yeah that was the task force, right. You, and Greg and Ted and I.

**MK:** Yeah.

**BD:** Yup.

**MK:** To knock out bylaws, to knock out who initially --

**BD:** The initial coalition stuff.

**MK:** Where the board members were gonna come from. Because we also knew that it needed -- we wanted to be a (\_\_\_?) because that was decided at the forum, at that meeting. So we had one or two --

**EM:** The service area at the county...(\_\_\_?)

**MK:** Right, the service area were the (\_\_\_?) so we wanted representatives from the (\_\_\_?) and we also wanted representative in the LGBT community. So, we had to bring all of these factors together to try to come up with a board amount of board members that would start this whole thing. And it was around December when we had that first meeting, that first board meeting?

**BD:** I know that at least one of them was because I remember...

**EM:** So I was asked to come to join the early version of the board in 2002, so what years are you talking about?

**BD:** Probably about 2002.

**EM:** Yeah.

**MK:** Yeah, that's what I think it was, around there.

**BD:** Because we met at -- were we still meeting at the Queer (\_\_\_?) Foundation when you came on or had we moved to one?

**EM:** I think we might have met through the Great Harrisburg Foundation.

**LM:** Because I started with you there.

**EM:** Yes.

**MK:** The Fulton Bank (\_\_\_?) That's where we first met. That was the first board meeting.

**BD:** Yeah, our offices.

**MK:** Right your offices.

**BD:** Right.

**MK:** Right.

**BD:** And then we started meeting at the foundation offices. And...yeah it was a slow start, I mean we got to that point, we got some board members and it was like, okay what do we do now? [laughs]

**MK:** [laughs] It was!

**BD:** Yeah we kind of needed programming and Dave still... was he? He was on the first board was he the first president?

**MK:** No, T(\_\_\_\_?) was..

**LM:** No, Dave was. When I was hired it was 2008, and the executive committee was -- that hired me was David as president, Ben as vice president, Katie as secretary and Patty Bisuck (ph) as treasurer. Was that right?

**MK:** Yeah.

**EM:** Yeah.

**LM:** So that was 2008. And we called it a board, but legally they were still a committee of the foundation.

**EM:** (\_\_\_?) of the foundation. We were a project.

**MK:** But we...and even before then there was, we called ourselves a coalition.

**LM:** That was then too.

**MK:** Right.

**BB:** But there's like five years here right?

**MK:** Right, right. Because—

**BD:** It was very slow.

**MK:** Right we had Common Roads, and then we didn't know what to call this group.

**LM:** When you say “we” had Common Roads, the community had Common Roads. The center didn't have it...

**MK:** Right, right. We didn't have a center.

**BB:** The center doesn't exist yet.

**EM:** No.

**MK:** Right, the center...

**EM:** There's no building. It did not exist as a legal entity. So it started by the time that I came on the board in 2007, it was a project under the offices of the community center, from there –

**MK:** Under the foundation –

**EM:** The Foundation for Enhancing Communities, sorry. And that committee/board coalition was moving towards the idea of putting together a community center, whether that be an actual space or a virtual space. But Common Roads is still a separately, corporate, non-profit, operating organization.

**BL:** Had you received funding yet? Had you received the \$100,000, did you raise money and did you receive an actual gift yet –

**BD:** Well, yes. I think that point we had most if not all of it. But all the money didn't go to center, it went to organizations. I think \$20,000 or \$30,000 went to the center for like scene money. There was money to do the initial study and then what was another \$24,000 or something we had for startup money.

**MK:** But you know what I just remembered? We started meeting at the bank building out on at the tech center. Who was the fellow that –

**LM:** That's (\_\_\_\_?), he was the president of Common Roads, that's Common Roads.

**MK:** Okay, but both groups met. I was on the Common Roads board but also the coalition was meeting there for awhile.

**EM:** Well, when we were merging.

**MK:** We were merging.

**EM:** I think that's getting a little ahead.

**BD:** Yeah, that's about 2008.

**BL:** Okay, I just wanna be clear, you raise this money and you had a matching gift of \$100,000. So you had a \$200,000 fund.

**BD:** Right, but again it was not all of the center. The GAL Partnership with the foundation at the side. Money went to the switchboard and to the the men's chorus and the women's chorus. Who else did we fund? There was the precursor to Quality PA

**EM:** Pride.

**BD:** Pride, we gave money to pride...

**BL:** So the board was handling this. You called yourselves –

**BD:** No, not the board. They were two different –

**LM:** E.G.A.L.

**BD:** E.G.A.L.

**BL:** Oh, E.G.A.L was handling the \$200,000.

**BD:** Yeah, yeah. And they gave \$30,000 I think it was to this coalition, which was the precursor to the board itself once we went on ahead as the community center.

**MK:** Right, because we didn't know what to call it at first. It wasn't a center yet so that's why we came up with coalition name. And then there was a big thing: what are we going to do with Common Roads, are we going to keep separate entities.

**EM:** I think you are jumping ahead.

**BD:** Yeah, you are jumping ahead.

**MK:** Okay. Sorry! [laughs].

**EM:** 2007, I know was when we had it fully... a staff board. Meaning, there were probably a dozen folks in that group maybe.

**BD:** Yeah, there was Ellen Hues and who else was there?

**LM:** Diana, Adam, (ph), Stinson (ph), Marrons (ph)? No.

**EM:** No, that's later, she [Marrons] was in Common Roads.

**BD:** So, it was very slow. There was a couple years where we were trying to do – I didn't wanna do anyway – was to operate with just volunteers. They were just trying to get it together and we had some programming, I can't even remember what it was off the top of my head. You know, some trying to get people in involved. And there was a little bit, to be honest, a little bit of consternation. Like, "okay you we have all these work up a couple years ago, where is it?" And then we you know just decided okay, we need to make this happen. One of the first things we did, we hired Louis—

**MK:** As?

**BD:** As in part time—

**EM:** We were still not an incorporated group. And he part-time but he was our first professional staff.

**MK:** Didn't we first hire him as Common Roads youth server?

**EM:** No.

**LM:** No. This was before the merge.

**MK:** Before the merge.

**LM:** Before Common Roads was bought in. So it was 2008 and I think my job title was office manager/worker.

**MK:** Yes!

**BD:** Yeah! [laughs]

**MK:** That's right!

**BD:** And he was so cute, he was right out of college [laughs], and you [LM] were working with...you were living at St. Michael's right?

**LM:** Saint Stevens.

**BD:** Saint Stevens, right.

**LM:** I lived in a intentional community, you know, hippy commune (ph), Saint Stevens and I was working at Cornerstone Coffee House also part-time.

**BD:** That's right.

**EM:** And so Louis had office space at the Foundation for Enhancing Communities. Again, they were tremendously patient and supportive all through this process.

**BD:** They ran into us for a song.

**EM:** We were having monthly board meetings. And as I remember it, Common Roads start to run into I think a combination of staff and funding issues. And felt that it was going to be difficult for them to continue on as a separate, independent entity. And some of those Common Roads board members, I think ... right it might've been you headin the Common Roads board at the time.

**MK:** I can't remember, I was on the coalition which made it like...

**BD:** Ted. Ted was on Common Roads board.

**EM:** A number of folks were on the Common Roads board came to us and said, floated this idea of: well what if we kinda combine these. One is not quite an organization yet and one is established organization that had a track record, doing community work for a long time. I was really excited about that opportunity because we needed our own legal entity to really go out and do something. But to create a separate entity, always seeing a lot of effort for...this is more of an efficient way to sort of get it to where we want it to go. And to tie the development of a center to an organization that did have a long track record, a good reputation in the community and had been doing good work, just made a tremendous amount of sense to me.

**MK:** Well, there was a big “how are we going to combine them?” You know it was a big discussion on if it was going to be equal. And finally it came out that we would, the center would umbrella the other organizations under it. And the first one was Common Roads.

**EM:** So legally speaking, the coalition that we would have been operating under, just came under the corporate entity that was Common Roads, but that was then renamed the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania, and Common Roads was a project that branched from that.

**BD:** I think in the beginning, and you of all did Common Roads can correct me, but my impression was that Common Roads, the board, while they wanted to install the need and intelligence of merging, they still wanted to keep somewhat of their own identity.

**EM:** Right, especially the name.

**BD:** Yeah, especially the name. So we had this, you know, project, and how we'd be a project of the center. But I think that's... really, that really changed every time it became less and less important to people, right?

**LM:** Well, my observation was that there was a lot of time, I mean, in between this idea and moving into the merge where, I mean I think there was a governance of committee where people from both boards talked about how a governance worked. There was a fundraising one, when they talked about that. And the programming...so, there was this whole process where people from both cords were recommending what this potential organization merger would be. And yes, there was a lot of sensitivity around the name Common Roads. I mean, I was still new so I thought that was really interesting. So, when a merge happens, my parttime job turned to a full time job because the parttime youth coordinator had left Common Roads. Common Roads had no staff.

**MK:** It was Carol, and then Michelle, and then Michelle had left to take the job.

**LM:** There was one and that's Steph. Michelle as a parttime youth director, and she had left. After Michelle left, there was no staff. So that youth job and my parttime job became my full time job. And I did hear these things like what does the community think. There was a lot of suspicion in the community, just in general. I think some stuff had happened with other organizations and –

**MK:** Yeah, there was.

**LM:** It was different than the center but I think people were sort of like, questioning, is this going to be the same kind of run around, is the center going to swallow up Common Roads? Which I never understood because it was our only program there! [laughs]

**MK:** Right! And we needed it.

**LM:** Right, we need this program, I recognized it.

**MK:** There was a lot of sensitivity about swallowing up Common Roads. And there's a lot of pride because it had been well-established. And so that was the first thing, to kind of assure if we put them under the center, that they weren't going to be swallowed up. I remember like seeing a—

**EM:** It was my graphic. [laughs]

**MK:** [laughs] your graphic, there you go! You won't be swallowed up by (\_\_\_?)

**EM:** That (\_\_\_?) chart of here's the center, here's youth programming, here's adult programming, and here's...we...and of course, things don't exactly work out the way you plan them on paper but the integrity of the Common Roads programming has continued. And you know, it still continues to be a major effort of the community center. So, I'm...

**LM:** You could even say that Common Roads grew as a program as a part of the center. I mean I know when I started there really wasn't any attendance at the weekly meetings. The parents (\_\_\_?) Lancaster was pretty strong.

**MK:** Even before that you were meeting at Saint Stevens.

**LM:** That's when we merged.

**MK:** Right, and that's when we merged. And then the Lancaster (\_\_\_?) started.

**LM:** It actually had already been started before the merge.

**MK:** Oh okay.

**LM:** It was there when I, when I..

**BL:** Who started that?

**LM:** Oh that a women named Michelle's leadership. And there was a group down there, that I guess had contacted Michelle..

**BL:** (\_\_\_?)

**LM:** Melvy (ph) was involved. It was known as an advisory committee. Melvy Kind (ph)...

**BL:** Melvy Kind?

**LM:** Rob Shingles (ph) Steve (\_\_\_?)

**MK:** Milly (ph) was on the first board too.

**BD:** That's right. A Lancaster representative.

**MK:** Right.

**LM:** And so that program was going and we had a student intern from Millageville (ph)? (\_\_\_\_\_)?) And really she grew that program, which is why there was an attendance there. And I was really grateful for her and I remember because she knew what she was doing. There was no staff when we merged so I was just sort of like [laughs].  
[group begins to talk over each other]

**LM:** And everyone was like you know this stuff and I was like I don't know anything...

**BB:** So how many people were attending Common Roads when you took over?

**LM:** I was not attending...oh how many were?

**BB:** Yeah.

**LM:** I mean, there was one regular. And then people would just drop in sometimes. It was not in good shape. I mean, I think the history of Common Roads, there's always been that there's been waves of people.

**BB:** So, what is it now?

**LM:** Oh, I don't even know. At this point there's still both Harrisburg and Lancaster groups. There's a young adult program, so we did that a few years ago when we realized that the age group was 14-22. And we didn't really have any people who were on the higher end of that age group because if they came they would see younger people. And this group would go back so we created an adult group too. And that's just, if I understand it it's still packed 200 (ph) ? people a week.

**BD:** Wow.

**LM:** But I think moving here really help expand because our space at St. Steven's did not accommodate a lot of younger youth.

**MK:** It wasn't handicap accessible.

**LM:** On the third floor.

**EM:** It wasn't able-bodied accessible. By the time I got up to that third floor...

**LM:** Third floor, in town and getting from out of town it was sort of hard to pull up on the front street and drop off a kid if you didn't you would just park around the corner if you weren't comfortable in the city. So I think a lot of us thought you're always going to be defined by the size of the room that people can meet in.

**BD:** Right. See the other thing that I think is important with the center in general and for you in particular Louis was your involvement in helping to get started gay straight alliances in schools and going.

**BB:** We're going to go back to that.

**MK:** But going back to knowing we were outgrowing St. Steven's, or not only outgrowing but because of these other reasons that we needed to get another space. That's when Jeanine was on the board and Jeanine has had a concept...

**EM:** Jeanine who was at the time the president of Transensual (ph).

**MK:** And not only that but she was a contractor.

**EM:** Yes.

**MK:** So that helped a lot when we started looking for space. Where are we going to go? To have a space for the center?

**BD:** One of the spaces that David, my spouse, David Lee was apart of the committee that was looking at potential spaces. And I think one of the ones they looked at is where the Millworks (ph) is at.

**MK:** Because I had said that I saw this building that was abandoned and really I remember this at the board meeting I said holy smokes we could do that and I don't know how much it would cost, because I don't know anything about that. And I just thought it would be this great thing, we could have space for youth. Actually, for homeless youth, and everything. I think she looked at it was like, we can't possibly do that. It was like millions of dollars to try to renovate. But that was the space we looked at.

**EM:** I think you would want to go back. So we did have an actual merger, a legal merger. And then, I don't exactly know, I really should remember exactly what year.

**BD:** I think it was 2008, 2009

**LM:** I think the actual paperwork was February 2011.

**EM:** Okay, that makes sense.

**BB:** So then, when did this space occur? When did, what did you decide, at one point in Common Roads, what were the steps (\_\_\_?) that we have the space, and that the program...like what is the next transition?

**MK:** Well, I think we started looking here in midtown because we felt that we could get place—

**EM:** But it was awhile.

**MK:** Right.

**EM:** I mean after the merger it was two years.

**MK:** Right.

**EM:** Two...

**MK:** I mean—we didn't even know if we wanted a ...

**EM:** Two? 2011 –right?

**LM:** 2012 I think.

**MK:** ...wanted a physical space. There was a long time that we discussed a physical space versus an idea of a coalition and having programming.

**BL:** So what happens? You have one program, so what do you do?

**LM:** So, you mean what would I do like today? [laughs]

**MK:** [laughs]

**LM:** I'm sorry say that again.

**BL:** You have one program, so...

**LM:** I also wanna say that sometimes when people think of Common Roads they think, they think of, the most regular thing they think of – the thing they think of most readily is the weekly safe space meetings. And so, I remember even the youth would sometimes be like “this is your job to hang out with us on a Friday night?” And I was like “you have no idea.” Michelle, really, had done a lot of the G.S.A gay-straight alliance student clubs. I think Michelle’s big legacy in Common Roads is getting out into schools and developing youth conference and really developing training to do it internally. I think that she really raised the bar and when I started there were already folks who knew that we did this training stuff. So, I learned how to do that. They were coming to us looking for that education. So, I think that when people think about Common Roads, they think about weekly meetings. Which of course, is a core program, but there’s also technical assistance to G.S.A’s, training to schools, and enabling youth conference that Michelle started.

**MK:** But, even before that, Carol – that’s how I got involved – Carol Reesner (ph), who was the executive director of Common Roads, she was the first one, had contacted me and said “I wanna start training educators in the area” and this had never been done before; safe spaces for youth. And she contacted Bianca Cody-Murphy, who was a professor up at Wheaton College, and got her to write a training manual. And had contacted me at the department and I had, thank god I had a great boss because she called me and said “you’re gonna need money.” And I said, “I’ll find it, somewhere I’ll find it” and I did. So, in order... we also had the organization and the contacts to the school districts at the department of Ed. So, we invited, we held the first training for school teachers and nurses, guidance counselors and administrators. And we didn’t think anyone would show up. Because it’s a whole thing – asking schools to show up for safe spaces for GLBT kids. And we had, like 60 people standing on a waiting list. And we eventually ended up, through Carol’s efforts, with about 600 people.

**BL:** Was this through Common Roads?

**MK:** This was through Common Roads. But this was...

**EM:** Before the merger.

**MK:** This was...

**EM:** It was Carol. Before the...

**MK:** During Carol's tenure.

**BD:** (\_\_\_\_\_?)

**MK:** But that was the beginning of training for safe space for kids. Which ended up part of Louis' job, because Michelle continued that.

**LM:** Yeah and I really think that Michelle raised the bar for bringing in-house and her background was education. She started this youth conference, well under the leadership conference, called youth conference called the G.S.A Leadership Summit. So, all of this became part of the center's programming. Again, people think of weekly meetings, again, core program, so important, but there so was so much more than just that weekly meeting.

**EM:** And the center itself, apart from youth programming, was working on doing a more adult-centered programming. There were early discussions then about the aged group. March Davis was on the original board and she was part of those efforts. And F.A.B (ph) was bought back as a event, a fundraiser vehicle, but you know, a community event. So, that was going on before the merger and certainly before the building, before the space.

**LM:** And there was other staff. We hired a staff person to start developing some of that programming and there was like the book club, and the outdoors...and then

**BD:** Right, right.

**LM:** And then...

**BL:** So where were your (\_\_\_?) at this point? There was no building so where were you...

**MK:** We still didn't have a building.

**EM:** So St. Stevens was where Common Roads was and where Louis' office was. And where... so that's where the center offices were.

**LM:** When we merged the center base moved in with Common Roads. And then that was the office, where Common Roads had been operating.

**EM:** Yeah. And then other programming like the book club was done at the Scholar (ph). And other programs were just done in other spaces around the community.

**LM:** The outdoors club we were...

**BD:** Outside [laughs].

**EM:** The outdoors.

**LM:** All over the regions, is what I mean [laughs].

**MK:** So, with the... and it goes back with St. Steven's not being appropriate for what we needed. Not only for the center, but also for the youth and everything. We started looking for spaces and that's when you guys, David and a group went to look at where the Millworks is and we looked at several other spaces I think.

**BD:** One thing I thought was interesting...

**BL:** When was the funding coming in at this point? Like the fund moving or the people you were hiring like where was the money coming from?

**MK:** F.A.B...

**LM:** F.A.B. was the first one, in a sort of new era, was only in 2009, Fall 2009 so we still haven't quite gotten there yet. When it might've started, which was 2008. So we were still using the Seed (ph), individual donations...

**BD:** We had some other fundraisers here and there.

**LM:** Certainly yours and David's.

**BD:** Oh yeah. [laughs]

**EM:** We would ask members of the community.

**MK:** Ben and his husband.

**BD:** For 15 years, we had a party at our house. We have a little Elizabeth Town and the fair is in our backyard. We thought this was a great idea for a party, and we started it as a fundraiser for the community. And we would do that every year. We would ask people to come and we would ask for a certain donation to come, we'd supply all the food and drink and everything. All the money would go to the center.

**MK:** We raised a huge amount of money over the years.

**BD:** Especially in the last couple. And then some people, it was nice, because some people who didn't come could even make a donation. Like, "sorry I can't come but here's \$100 bucks" or whatever.

**LM:** It was a great model for what we were doing. I mean we really tried to capture that, and get other people to do those kinds of things. Long-standing, successfulness – yours [BD] and David's. But I think it was a really good model for people to think about, how do we engage people to think about how do we engage people in a large region, where there's not this

centralized LGBT community? And also do things that build community because the party was not only a fundraiser but it was also a social thing to do. For folks to get together.

**EM:** I would like to...Louis just mentioned the scope of the geographic community has always been a challenge, frankly, for the center. I don't know exactly how anyone else did this from one end of our eight-county service area to the other but it's pretty far. And as part of sort of this suspicion about the center, and the general, maybe frustration with the slowness of the development; the other thing was, "oh it's just gonna be in Harrisburg". It's gonna be a bunch of white gay men in Harrisburg. And so, the board at least was continually very sensitive to that issue. And sensitive to, we need to have people from the West Shore (ph) counties, we need to have people from Lancaster, we need to draw people from Pulmer (ph), Adams counties, because we had learned through the community surveys and other just sort of national surveys also gay and lesbian and trans people live in the suburbs. And lots of those folks have children. So, we need to reach out to geographic diversity and sort of socioeconomic diversity, and that has always been challenging for the center. But I would suggest that it has always been challenging for every organization in central Pennsylvania. It's such a diffuse community, with a city center that not everyone agrees is a magnet –

**MK:** Well, in particular because we had a lot of –

**EM:** Divisive –

**MK:** -- communes that are very rural, and very conservative like Perry and several other counties that we didn't know... first of all, coming to the city, like we didn't wanna get that. And so, we tried to get things started. We would have various activities in different counties. But it was tough, it wasn't like people were hanging there in (\_\_\_?). And again, it could be because of how conservative people live in in that county. I don't think we're raising the rainbow flag.

**BD:** I disagree with the conservatism. I think it's more (\_\_\_?) I think it's, BB",s at it's cross board. I mean I'm involved in a chamber in Creenick (ph) and it's the same thing. Getting Lancaster and Lebanon in chambers to get involved in group things is tough. And...

**MK:** They sort of just stay in their own little...

**BD:** Exactly. And that was a frustration with me, you know, getting, particularly the three big cities in the area of Harrisburg, Lancaster and York. Getting Lancaster and York involved was...

**MK:** Yeah, it was tough.

**BD:** We had somewhat success I guess, down the road, getting Lancaster pride to come on and so forth.

**MK:** Well, that's probably very true because as much as people won't go from the East shore to the West shore, people weren't going from Lancaster to even Harrisburg. And we even tried with (\_\_\_?) to have...

**EM:** The first (\_\_\_?) was in Lancaster. To address exactly this issue, to say "Look, this is not gonna be just about Harrisburg, this is regional." We were very ...

**MK:** Purposeful.

**BD:** And it was very successful. The attendance was great, it was a great event.

**LM:** Yeah, I think. I don't know, it is somewhat of a paradox right, to have a community center and to serve a region. I mean, those are two different things, in some ways. Especially, I think also to point out just the larger. Like, the center isn't operating in a vacuum. It's part of this bigger central Pennsylvania community and public transportation isn't great. It's not like people are driven to this urban center of Harrisburg where you get services and there's more of this colloquial idea of have something in my neighborhood.

**BD:** And then that really fed into that idea in that there was this contingent when we were talking about a space and the building of space. There were some people who felt very strongly that we should be... that there was the idea of the center. We should just have programming here and the Lancaster and York; they thought having a space in Harrisburg would be detrimental, actually. And there were some very strong feelings about that.

**EM:** We looked at least space that was outside, it was centrally located in a way. I think ultimately it would've been a terrible idea because it was centrally located instead of a place that nobody would ever wanna go to. And would have a hard time getting there.

**MK:** Is that when we looked at the town?

**EM:** No, the church in midtown.

**MK:** Oh, okay we looked at that. That's when David (ph) was there, at the time, but we also looked at the tech center out by...

**EM:** Yeah. And I was on that trip, I mean I remember going to a number of spaces.

**MK:** Because of the roads. We thought, the roads that were going, it would be a great space if we could find something out there because everybody comes in, 82-83. We were really trying hard as a board to find a space that we felt that would draw in these other people from these other counties. That was a tough –

**EM:** So where do we end up? Midtown Harrisburg! [laughs] Epicenter.

**LM:** I think that's so right. I mean, Harrisburg is the capital and it is in the middle of a region and we had programming happening in Carlisle and Lancaster. At that point I was the executive director in 2012, and it was that summer. And that's, I think, the conversation was more like “we have to have an office, we have to have a main place, and do other programming around the region”. [laughs] I think that's what we tried to do ever since. It is a challenge, I mean it is...

**BB:** How did you raise money for this? Find the space and how did you raise money for it? How did you get, I mean it's like (\_\_\_?)

**BD:** Well, I think once we focused on the space and the needs we said “okay, we need money for this”. And people would step up to the plate. Isn't that how it worked....

**MK:** And Jeanine got a lot of, I think she, cut a lot of deals with Home Depot...

**BD:** She did, she was great.

**MK:** I mean she knew how to like contract...

**EM:** Build up.

**LM:** It was community members who laid the floor, who did painting, and then we did work with someone to do some of the more, I don't know, higher-level electrical work [laughs]. Volunteers couldn't do that but...

**EM:** And that money was raised through again, the development plan, as I assume there is now; a bunch of different sources – F.A.B being the biggest event fundraiser – grants, -- Louis was writing grants to various organizations, looking for gifts from foundations and private donors so it's always a mix of those sorts. Oh and sponsorships, the Hershey company and Hershey Entertainment Resorts were steadfast partners. They gave us a very generous funding early on and that was through some contacts through the chamber that we had at the chamber conference. Fundraising is just a continual struggle and effort.

**BD:** But I remember (\_\_\_?) certain people at the time and saying “hey, we have a space, we need money, can you give it a check?” And you know we got some money with that line. Once they—the idea of a space becoming reality, people were more apt to send money.

**EM:** I'm not sure when we rolled out memberships for the center but...

**BD:** I think that was a little later, but not too much later.

**EM:** Yeah, I don't think too much later but the idea was you know, pay an annual fee at whatever level, corresponding with a color to the rainbow flag. And...and That provided some sort of ongoing funding that we could, not exactly count on, but expect on a year-to-year...

**MK:** I mean that was one of the challenges, is where can we raise money? And we had a lot of board members that had house parties, in various areas. I remember going to Stenson's at Mount Retnot (ph). So,

**LM:** I think too once there was a space people kind of got it a little more. That was sort of my resolution... there were efforts to start new programs, and there were things happening but I think that when there was a place for people to come, it just made more sense in people's head. “Oh yeah, this is a community center.”

**BD:** That's important too about the house parties, I've forgotten about that. And we did have in the area people like Stenson and John (\_\_\_?), there were a lot of people and it was way of getting the word out among not only the LGBT community but the straight allies too. And I'm not sure how much money we got from some of those, probably some but I think it was really good in raising awareness.

**MK:** And that was a primary concern too, that would wanted to get that word out that we did now have a space. And, does anybody remember the date we like had our opening?

**LM:** It was the summer of 2012. Yeah. It was sometime over the summer. I remember I started in January as the executive director and then yeah. We moved in heat and in the back there was air conditioning –

**EM:** Oh yeah, the summer. [laughs]

**LM:** [laughs].

**BD:** Oh yeah.

**LM:** [chuckles] It was definitely summer. There was a festival on Front Street that we were competing with as we were moving. [laughs]

**EM:** Yeah.

**LM:** So I wanna say July. July 3<sup>rd</sup> was probably our first big community event?

**EM:** And that was another thing – we were able to do gallery showings and Third the Burg (ph) had – I'm not sure how long it had been going on but – this monthly event in Harrisburg that on Friday of every month, galleries are open. And having the space allowed the LGBT center to be right in the middle of that. We had...we found someone to curate the gallery and so, that was an immediate way to invite the public into the space. I thought that was a great way of sort of having the center kind of takeoff and have some profile, some public profile.

**LM:** Yeah, it was about being assertive that we're part of this community. I think people got that.

**BL:** That's wonderful. So now, today, how many programs are going on? How many programs – besides, we know you have Common Roads, and we know you have the History Project, the LGBT center, which I think is a wonderful idea.

**LM:** So there's programs for LGBT older adults, LGBT seniors --

**MK:** Women. We have a women's meeting --

**LM:** So then there's --

**EM:** I just remembered the first...we had struggled and struggled and struggled. And I hear Marlane's (\_\_\_?) tones in my head everytime I think about this so we had to have a women's group. We had to do it. And there were attempts at that and it never really just took off for whatever reason. Once we open these doors -- the first women's group -- I think there were 120 women in this room.

**BD:** Yeah.

**MK:** Mmhm.

**EM:** It was crazy. I wasn't here but someone sent a picture and I thought what- where -- what happened? [laughs] Where did all of these women all come from? But --

**BD:** And it's getting new people involved, it was Shoshanna (ph). Was that what you personally think at all?

**MK:** Yes, that's when she first got involved.

**EM:** An incredibly diverse array of women, from all over the region. Finally, some racial diversity, it was -- it was really...I did not personally believe they would come but in this instance, that happened. At least for the women's group, it was amazing. And that was very -- I don't know how.

**MK:** It worked --

**EM:** That program is still going on but it -- it -- it -- it was -- once it happened, became self-sustained.

**LM:** Right. Yeah, I mean –

**BL:** Is there a group for the trans group?

**LM:** We don't because there is a trans group in the area called Transcentral and so, we've done different things like...I mean, I think more of the youth and adult program is majority trans and gender non-conforming. And we've done things like had a trans group.

**BL:** What did you say, what group was it?

**LM:** Transcentral Pennsylvania.

**BL:** I know but the other.

**EM:** In the youth programming. So the...

**BL:** The youth program is mostly general?

**LM:** It's for – it's for LGBTQ+ youth and I would say most participants are transgender and gender queer and gender non binary any more. So, there isn't like the transgender brand of programs at the center, it's more about the community partnership with Transcentral and doing trans-related programming within.

**EM:** And that was very important. I know Ted Martin and I have thoughts and conversations about this but you know the larger national... gay rights organizations, I think, have struggled with including the trans community and of course, have struggled with lots of things – lots, lots of things, lots of inclusion issues. But, you know HRC in particular took such a self-inflicted black eye by agreeing to back replaced protection legislation that didn't include trans people. And it didn't get passed anyway. Which was entirely predictable, for most people. So, Ted was – I mean everybody else had a definite interest but Ted was passionate about making sure that we were always talking to people in the trans community. And that we had trans representation on the board. And at least as long as I was on the board I thought that we did a pretty good job at that. It's not easy, not all of the... obviously, many different issues...but there are enough similar issues, enough similar things that we could work on together.

**BD:** And not to dwell on it, but for a short time, we even had an executive director who was trans. And it didn't work out, which had nothing to do with her being trans, completely other reasons, but that's the extent that we went to make sure that we were inclusive.

**MK:** And Transcendental started a conference called the Keystone Conference under Jeanine –

**EM:** Which was a huge, successful conference.

**MK:** It still is it's still going on. It's the second-largest trans conference—

**EM:** In the east coast.

**MK:** Right. And what they is they started...Jeanine was on the board so she said, I guess in her mind like, "how could we all sort of help the youth?" So they would pull something to raise some money to do – to give the kids a chance to have a dance, or like a prom. LGBT prom.

**EM:** A date auction.

**MK:** We had a date auction for a couple different years. And I was participating a couple years so I had a date, I took –

**EM:** Ted.

**MK:** And Ted had – right. Ted had a date.

**EM:** Ted's husband Dwayne would bring their Rolls Royce and take a couple strides.

**BD:** [laughs] Did he really? That's fun.

**EM:** Yes. Don't you remember? He was a chauffeur.

**BD:** Well, I did know that part.

**MK:** Yeah, yeah. First one. So they supported us—

**EM:** That was an enthusiastic auction group. For a first year.

**MK:** It sure was.

**EM:** [laughs]

**MK:** I'm not even gonna go there! [laughs]

**EM:** It was pretty great.

**MK:** But, it raised a lot of money for those kids to have that prom. So...

**BL:** So the fund was for the LGBT center or...

**MK:** This was Transcentral and the Keystone Conference would hold.

**EM:** Because part of it they had something called the Butterfly Ball. Which was a... one night was for youth, for LGBT youth and just prior to that event.

**MK:** Friday night!

**EM:** Just a couple years – Friday night, they held a date auction. And so various members of the LGBT community would agree to be auctioned off for a date.

**LM:** Youth were not auctioned off to be clear.

**EM:** Just to be clear we are not –

**MK:** It was the adults that were auctioned off and then we would go – as one of them – we would go and have a date with [laughs] whoever bought us for the night.

**BD:** Bought your time.

**MK:** Thank you, bought our time. And so then we would take... it was a lovely event. I mean they would have dinner, dance and we would, you know, however you wanted to do it – we would pick our date up and then have... really it was a great event.

**EM:** That was all to benefit the youth at the Transcentral Conference, at the Keystone Conference.

**MK:** Right, and it was hooked into Common Roads, the youth at Common Roads. So there were a lot of things that the center had where we would join – when we had an opportunity – to join other organizations to benefit the center or some entity in the center. Some project, or some group in the center.

**EM:** Collaboration.

**MK:** Yeah, we tried a lot with that. Very successful with Transcentral.

**BL:** Are there any other programs that you're currently running?

**LM:** [laughs] Sorry.

**MK:** Yeah, I think, really the interview should go there now.

**LM:** Yeah, well I think another big...

**BB:** G.S.A (Gay Straight Alliances)?

**MK:** It's become a big program that Michelle started but Louis just – it took off. And it's been so successful. That was the one thing...because back when it first started and we were doing training for people, teachers and so on, with collaboration with Common Roads meaning; the Department of Ed, we're just introducing the concept of safe schools for kids and the fact that Common Roads existed. However, it was like trying to bring kids here...or bring adults here or...G.S.A's were non-existent. At that point. And if they were, it was very sparse. But I don't remember a lot of G.S.A, but they started popping up as the safe – as training happened, and as part of this training, assuring school districts that they have every right. You have to approve,

legally, approve a G.S.A that tries to start. And a lot of kids were trying to start these things, trying to find sponsors – it was tough, at first. But then they grew.

**LM:** Yeah, so the first G.S.A summit was in 2008 and that was when Common Roads was still its own independent entity and Michelle Simmons was the executive director. It was in a partnership with Planned Parenthood. So, Planned Parenthood was a key partner when we're talking about the youth programs because they had a youth program called The Curve in York. So, Common Roads had two weekly meetings. One in Harrisburg, one in Lancaster and then there was this other one in the region that was in York. And Debby Gable (ph) when she started that program, she met with Carol Singer and learned a lot from Common Roads. So I think Common Roads was really a leader example and a model. And so Planned Parenthood, Common Roads and H.A.C.K. The first GSA summit was at the H.A.C.K. Then, I started it, well the GSA summit is at Dickinson [College] now, it's happening. That was one of the first things I remember doing. And that was the second annual one. The third annual one was the first one that I saw through the whole time. So it's been at Dickinson ever since 2009. The structure of it is that it is a one-day event, where these different groups from highschools, GSAs, Gay-straight Alliances, the language has certainly evolved to be things like Gender and Sexuality alliances, so...

**MK:** So, workshops...

**LM:** So in schools I'm talking about GSA, Queer-Straight Alliances, and they would come for like a conference and they would hear from a Keynote speaker, go to workshops in different topics and meet different community members. Present those...and overtime, we even developed an R of P process so it really, we really kind of boosted it. And made it a big event. It grew every year, I think this past year we received 400 people over the course of three days so we grew it in terms of attendants and the number of days.

**EM:** The first group was – we split between two days for high school...one day it was high school students and one day it was college students. But now it's two high school days, one college day.

**BB:** What are some of the subjects you talk about?

**LM:** Yeah so it's really interesting we've always had...instead of informational, like transmitting information, we always wanted it to be more practical. So, instead of thinking of HIV 101, it was more like "how to do an HIV awareness event at your school". Or instead of like, "Transgender 101 Panel", it was more like "how to have a transgender inclusive GSA". So that's always sort of the focus. It's a really creative process I think and we really listen to what students are asking for. You know, from the Dickinson connection with the LGBT history

project, we've had the last couple of years, the opportunity for students to go into the archives and learn about LGBT archives. So in many ways it was capitalizing on the creativity of our community members and what they wanted to bring, and what we sort of thought was relevant for young people.

**MK:** How many people – GSA's came the first year versus where we are now?

**LM:** [sighs] Oh, yeah, I don't even know. I think it's sort of – in terms of people, I would say 100 in the beginning, upward to 400 now. It's something that these student groups have in their calendar every year, it's a thing that they do. It's a chance for them to see each other. I think it's important to note too that one of the barriers that always has and always will exist for LGBT youth programming – especially in a place like Central Pennsylvania – is just not being able to get to the meetings. So, if you're too young to drive, if you have parents who don't want you to go or you can't take public transportation or you can't walk. And so doing work at schools has been really important here to make sure that there were you know, teachers and adults in the school building who were visible, who were visibly accepting that young people could go to. And then the clubs, the GSA clubs. So this was really – the event was really developed to bring those groups together and the being together part is really important. The workshops, you know we spent a lot of time making sure we had great workshops but it's almost secondary to being in the same room as other queer young people. Which in Central Pennsylvania, where else would you possibly get that? So, I think that's what the cool part of it is.

**EM:** And the GSA groups come with their faculty advisor.

**LM:** Right, so it's on a school day. Very important point. Yes, it's part of the school day. They take a field trip, they get school busing, a lot of them do fundraising throughout the year to pay to come. And yeah, there were workshops that are specifically for the adults.

**BB:** Are these from the eight counties?

**EM:** Well beyond. Eight counties and well beyond. I know there's a school district in Philadelphia, right, that comes every year?

**LM:** Yeah, we had a school from New Jersey.

**EM:** I think there have been out of state.

**LM:** We would at least focus the marketing in our region but because it such a special event...

**BB:** Are most of these kids LGBT or are some of them straight? I mean how would you define...

**LM:** Yeah, I think that –

**EM:** Definitely allies in those groups I mean the GSAs are meant to be just that – LGBT kids and allies.

**LM:** And a lot of the times they function as like a place, a safe place for anyone who's experiencing bullying or doesn't really have a lot of friends. There's sort of like a heavy accepting place in a lot of schools. And some people have LGBT parents of course, that's why they get interested. Yeah.

**BB:** I just keep thinking (\_\_\_?) old story...(ph)

**LM:** We definitely reacted sort of...I don't know, during my involvement in Common Roads, something that was always very important to me was to like shift this idea of a sad gay kid, being depressed and coming to the gay youth group. LGBTQ youth are smart and they're leaders and they are powerful people who are going to change the world, and how can we be part in developing that and create space for them to meet each other. So I know that people have brochures [laughs] where you just look at them are they were like [says in exaggerated somber tone] "I'm gay". That was sort of the sound in my head.

**BD:** To keep them from committing suicide.

**EM:** That is – it's very interesting because I remember many years ago, Louis and I meeting at an event, a social event meant to be purely social. And of course, we ended up talking about the center, center programming, Common Roads. And we were in conversation with a man, with a gay man, who is a friend – although I had just met him for the first time – who had really pushed back on this idea of LGBT youth as leaders. And it was –

**LM:** Oh yeah! [laughs] I remember that.

**EM:** I know you remember this conversation, because it was very contentious. He was really invested at the time – and I think he became more invested as we were arguing about it, and that's just sort of a function of having an argument – of these kids being victimized about certain larger school societies and their families. That may have been an experience, I certainly don't

know. Louis and I were sort of, advocating for these kids; “no these kids – they’re bringing a tremendous amount of resilience to this effort and they have tremendous leadership capabilities”. We exist to support that, not to just council –

**BD:** To nurture.

**EM:** Right, to nurture that. Not to just council you know, kids that are having a hard time with it. It was really interesting to hear that pushback from somebody who clearly had gone through that process. I – I still...it was very frustrating at the time, it was in retrospect very fascinating to me. That it was not so obvious to say “oh we shouldn’t treat them like sidegig, as we should treat them like potential leaders of their community”.

**BB:** I’m sure there could’ve been victims –

**EM:** Of course. Absolutely.

**BB:** But to turn that around –

**LM:** That’s not the story of who LGBTQ youth have to be.

**BB:** I know.

**BD:** That’s one of the valuable things I think you [LM] in particular, Louis, to have that mindset because I’ll admit when I, you know, was first heard Common Roads and became involved with the center and so forth, I thought it was to support victimized LGBT youth too. Because I was a sad, lonely gay kid in high school and that was my experience. But you turned it around and that’s really empowering.

**LM:** I think that’s also with having in the culture. I think that, I didn’t mean to disturb, certainly didn’t mean to disparage previous messaging because I think that is meeting a need and that is real. And so this is just part of the development of the community more broadly. And to do that here –

**BB:** I think that’s the point about why the difference, now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In wideness the center, I mean what’s happening now in Central Pennsylvania or basically all over the place, at least what I hear about – you know, because there was no place to go. Even where I grew up. I mean I was alone, you didn’t know the world’s changed now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And there’s a chance that you’re not alone, or you...

**EM:** You just – you think about it, even in the last 10 years, man I can't even remember this -- but the whole, Dan Savage's It Gets Better project. That was a fabulous project but it was of it's time. You know, less than 10 years ago and now, thing looks different. Not that there still aren't kids who are facing tremendous challenges in communities but at least there are many more visible examples of an alternative to that.

**LM:** And I think if you tried to start a project now called It Gets Better, you would get even louder pushback around like “no, our job is to make it better and we deserve better”.

**BB:** I mean you're facing youth (\_\_\_?) yesterday. It's a fight, things have gotten better but you know it's like it's kind of a new community for transgender people. Cause they're just you know...everything is a progression. We have it better than...those of us 20 years ago.

**EM:** It is and that's okay, that's what it means to be... the challenge and opportunity of having a community center is you know you need to reflect the changes that are happening. Be nimble enough to keep growing. I was, when I first came to Harrisburg, was on a board of South Central Assistance Network Board. When I started on that board – this was before the advent of cocktails, you know the cocktail treatment for HIV and stans mission, this was not a rip mission but it was to help people die. And that turned around, I'm sure it didn't feel like this for people who were sick, but it turned around on a dime with final medical advances and S.C.A.N was not (\_\_\_?) enough an organization to make that shift. And it was not the fault of anyone on that board, it just had...it was required to do something completely different than it had been doing before and it wasn't able to make that shift.

**BD:** Help people live.

**EM:** Help people live, that's right.

**MK:** And that shift even with the --

**EM:** That's just an observation of organizational value.

**MK:** Right. When we first started with those, reaching out for faculty to, or high school faculty to come to a gathering or a workshop. Then, when Louis came, he went to them. And that was remarkable because you went to all these highschoools to meet and introduce that topic. And

workshop, after workshop, after workshop. That, in turn, got more word out there and more people focused on this issue. At the same time, there was a change in society that was happening.

**EM:** And that goes back to the initial observation that you have to have professional staff to really have a robust effort. Because it's great we all volunteer, we're all doing a lot of work but you don't have the organizational capacity without so...

**LM:** I wanna go back to what you said though about how it's always getting better in the previous generations and I think something that I've learned from the history project that is there are also things that are lost. As things change. So I think that – certainly me and my partner talk about this a lot – we don't really go to gay bars but that hasn't felt like I need to go there in order to find my people. And a lot of people would articulate that as a good thing. Some people may say that that's good you feel like a community beyond that. But there's also something I think that we will never know about creating a community in that way, and I think that's something that's lost in a community. I don't think that something that – there's just not a straight trajectory up. I think that there are different things that are lost.

**EM:** There's a lot of writing about the death of gay culture. That certain aspects that did flourish because it was so repressive, the larger society was so repressive that...that's how great art gets made sometimes you know [chuckles]. It's different.

**MK:** That was one of the purposes that we wanted programming for all these different groups – elders and all of that – because we wanted to have an alternative to the bars. This was gonna be, this was gonna be the place you could come and meet and you wouldn't feel like you had to go to the bar if you didn't want to. Sometimes people that didn't wanna go to the bars felt that they didn't have any other place to go, and all of a sudden this was gonna, we were hoping that this would create that place to go.

**BD:** Along these lines, you know mentioning the elders, I think really think we'd be remissive. He [LM?] didn't speak a little bit more about the AG McPride (ph). I think that's come a long way too and I think that the conference that you [LM] had last year which was sort of a beginning near of the youth conference. Which was just great.

**LM:** Yeah, I mean so the youth pride programming started before we moved here, to this space like a lot of the programs. The conversation about the women's program, was more able to take off once we had a space and so there were things like monthly meetings...yeah, to your point then, really trying to mirror the structure of Common Roads. They were having discussions and gatherings of folks apart of that group. And also being able to go out and do training, the service provider network, which we did –

**MK:** Well, I remember having meetings. That's where I first met Pat!

**LM:** Yeah.

**MK:** Because Pat was having, we were in a group together talking about elders and how we help train people in nursing homes and assisted living and all these different places to recognize the fact that some coming to them are LGBT and they've been with their partners for years and how are you treating them? Are you trying to separate them in different rooms? And that was before the laws changed, too. Then the marriage laws. So, all of this happened at one time but before that we were very concerned with elderly people that would be going to where a partner was put into either a hospital or a nurse –

**EM:** Screened up the movie, (\_\_\_?)

**LM:** Gen silent like G-E-N, generation. And that was again, every county – not every county but we did it in Harrisburg, Lancaster and York, Lebanon [chuckles].

**MK:** What would happen to you if you were elderly and you were getting into your older ages and trying to—

**EM:** -- did not have the cultural competency, even if they were inclined to deal humanely with folks they just didn't.

**BD:** Well, going to those points and then also Louis' point earlier about losing something as you progress, you know as you gain – as you progress you sometimes also lose some good things too. When I, what was godsent for me was after college, my first real job, I was (\_\_\_?), there was a group called Lee Hi Ho in Allentown. And it actually predated Stonewall, which was very interesting. It was a small group and so forth, and there I met this older couple. Paul and Paul. One Paul was a professor at Princeton and the other was teacher at the Friend School in Manhattan. And they became my gay dads, and they were just so great in that they were just so encouraging and they were such an example, and they really helped me out at that time. 'Cause I was really struggling, I had come out, sort of, you know, I wasn't out at my job, I wasn't out to my parents at that time and they were just very encouraging. And when they got to be older – I mean I stayed friends with them their whole lives – so the second Paul died just a year ago. They went to Luther Press in Allentown and when they went in, they said to them “you realize we're a gay couple” and they were never able to marry which was too bad because they were together for 56 years. And the administration at Luther Press said “yes, we will be you know proud to have you join us” and they took him in. So at that level they were good but there was no looking down

about how the staff would interact. They actually, when they first got there, went through the hall together, they were other residents who called them faggots. And you know it was like junior high. And it was just amazing to me, you know. The administration just didn't do anything. They weren't trained, they didn't know how...I don't think there was anything malevolent – I mean obviously not because they knew that they were there but and that's really, what got me very very interested in their topic.

**LM:** Of course Barry knows the idea of documenting history came about as part of talking about programming for adults. So I think it's been really interesting way of (\_\_\_?) that.

**EM:** And the, I think this idea of cultural competency training has been one of the great legacies that the center has laid down with Louis in particular. Going out into communities to non-LGT spaces and just talking to folks...pure education about who this community is and how every other community could be more inclusive. That's been tremendously helpful. It was always a great demand from organizations to come give those talks.

**BD:** Very valuable. It's kinda behind the scenes because it's something that, unless you were apart of that training you didn't see that. And hopefully you did a good enough job of letting everyone know that the center, community that you were doing that, you know the value you were giving to the greater area.

**LM:** I think, folks...we get to see a little bit of that when the center became a trusted source of information and needed to.

**EM:** Yes.

**BD:** I think that's a good point.

**LM:** I think that's a big role that the center has played where community needed a place to go, and of course that's a hard thing to speak on the behalf of a community and how can we really do that, but you also have to. So I think that was something that we struggled with over the years. Struggled in a positive way, like trying to kind of hold that message. Representing a community well [chuckles].

**BB:** (\_\_\_\_\_)?

**MK:** The center also was very present at the prides. So there was always a up move to make sure that – because Pride would be pulling people in from all over, not only from Central Pennsylvania but beyond to know that there was a center here. We usually had, not only had the center at the table but we also had Common Roads at the table. So people were getting educated at all the different Prides every year about what we were all about.

**BB:** It's impressive. It's an impressive part of the chapter.

**BD:** One other thing I would like to bring up – and that kind of almost circles back to the beginning in a way – is that...we talked about funding earlier and that's for any nonprofit really hard. One of the things that I tried to do in my final years of the center was to really focus on it being sustainable and led the development efforts there for a couple of years. And we really worked hard to standardize and further develop the membership program to giving value to members, we were able to get the center qualified as a organization in Wisica (ph), the state employee combined appeal, their virtually in the united way. Where you know the state employees could give to the center direct funds. We got listed the united way. We changed – goes back you were asking about the \$200,000 from that original fundraising effort. \$20,000 of that was put – and this is something that Jeff Welshman's in particular pushed, another member of the community was involved early on, we hadn't mentioned him before – he really wanted to a permanent fund.

**BL:** An endowment fund.

**BD:** An endowment fund for the community. And this was even predated the center and so we started a fund with \$20,000 out the foundation and over the years we've grown that to \$55,000 and it's not huge but you know \$55,000 is decent. And so in again, my last years, we had that fund converted that it just supports the center now. That's the sole purpose of it now. And so that gives a couple thousand dollars extra every year and hopefully that'll grow over the years that people give to and so forth. So I just think that you know there's the programming that's most important thing. That's what we do, the value we give the community but there has to be the—

**MK:** The money behind it.

**BD:** The money behind it, or you can't do the program.

**BL:** Yeah but you guys got a really good – [laughs] that's a big endowment.

**EM:** Yeah.

**BL:** A couple million dollars down –

**LM:** For an organization center sized the fact that it has an endowment I think is very impressive and speaks to that early organizer then.

**BD:** I'd compare this, I was years ago on the Art Association Board and that's an organization that's been around since what, the 1920's?

**EM:** '26.

**BD:** Yeah, '26 and their endowment is \$12,000. And, you know so.

**EM:** There's never a right time to start one. And you really pushed to make sure that you have to start it today.

**BD:** Yeah, it's like saving for your time.

**EM:** Yup, so. It's been a journey – it's been a fabulous journey for me.

**BL:** Well, I am impressed. I'm really impressed, in just writing this book a lot about Central Pennsylvania and the people who built this community.

**MK:** The three of us, as well as many other people stayed on the board a long time before we said it's time to turn it over. I think 13, 14 years or so most of us put in.

**EM:** I was probably on the board for 9, 8 or 9 years.

**MK:** Yeah.

**LM:** It was the committee, the prequel to the board (ph).

**MK:** Right.

**EM:** It was, almost without exception terrific. There were some times... it was tough.

**LM:** [chuckles]

**EM:** But I will give everyone credit that everyone really kept their eye on the ball. Even when we had tremendous financial difficulties and some staffing challenges. People would come to meetings and they would say okay, let's remember what we do, what we do well, you know, and move forward on that basis.

**LM:** I think that's a really important thing to consider when we think about the center because I think that that was a great antidote to the mistrust that folks had. And I think that other organizations that have been like, sort of pack my bags and leave mentality if I didn't get my way. And I think the center did really did always sort of stay up on that. Which is important.

**EM:** It's not easy.

**LM:** Yeah, it didn't have to be that way [chuckles].

**EM:** No, no, it didn't.

**MK:** People who were at the board stayed a long time and worked very hard to get this place in a city.

**EM:** Well, not to be overdramatic but sort of becomes like your child.

**MK:** Yes it does.

**BD:** Yes, that's true.

**MK:** I would totally agree. It's like you know –

**LM:** I think what I've heard too is – we've talked about this – when things were hard, we'd then hear from a young person who was benefitting from what we're doing. That was something that kept folks connected.

**EM:** Yes, we would have visitors to board meetings on a regular basis. And I do remember one board meeting that was I was really – I felt like I was really pushed to my limit and we had some kids there who talked about what they were doing and it was just like [snaps fingers] just the antidote to bitterness.

**BD:** That's a great idea. Your idea to bring people who benefitted from the center to board meetings so that you know we could all be reminded of that, of what we're doing.

**EM:** 'Cause boards get so inward looking and you can get so focused on whatever – whether it's navel gazing (ph?) – whatever you get so focused on, sort of the inner workings of everything, you forget why you're there.

**MK:** Well, and if faculty – we were giving our youth award too and that really helped bring us stories.

**BD:** Oh yeah, there were some really great recipients there.

**MK:** Bought those stories to FAB and told us... 'cause FAB was a big fundraiser and it told us what we were doing was right. That here's the beneficiary of what we did.

**BD:** That was also a good way to raise money too. And we would get people together for money in like house parties and we'd bring youth who was very articulate.

**BB:** So it's F.A.B that basically set up to fund this?

**MK:** It was predated it, but it – and then it kinda like fizzled out for a few years and then we restarted it in order to fund the efforts.

**BD:** After we raised 200,000 the interest kind of dropped off. It went away, for a few years.

**BB:** What was the cost of the event? What was the ticket cost?

**MK:** Not bad, it was about a 100 bucks I think.

**EM:** It's always been about 100 bucks.

**MK:** Well, it was until last year.

**EM:** Oh, yeah.

**MK:** And then they dropped it to \$80 or \$85 or whatever.

**EM:** Most organizations aren't doing these big black-tie events anymore. Sort of across the board.

**LM:** The gala addiction, I think is what...[chuckles].

**BB:** Yes. Is that what they call it?

**MK:** It was not only a black-tie event and dinner but it was always a huge auction, silent auction that we would raise money at in F.A.B.

**LM:** F.A.B is – I guess we should at least spend a little time talking about it – it was a good fundraiser, but it take a lot of effort. A lot of volunteer effort, a lot of staff effort. It's not purely a fundraising vehicle, it's also – really a program for the community. For people to come out and get dressed up, party and have a good time. And all of that kind of – there are a of internal conflicts there. Y'know, are you putting on this party just for the community? Are we raising enough money? Is it worth the time investment? And, those were questions that we went through every year.

**MK:** And it was a way to recognize the people who did this. And that was a good thing. Ben got an award, I got an award. So, I mean it was really good and there was many people before that.

**BB:** Is it still going on?

**MK:** Yup, yup.

**BL:** When is it?

**MK:** This year.

**EM:** Early November. 30<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> November.

**MK:** Oh I thought it was in September.

**EM:** Dave moved – they moved it.

**MK:** Oh I didn't know that.

**BB:** Was it dinner dancing?

**EM:** Yup, it was dinner and dancing. So the initial interation and this was both before the center and when it came back in 2009. It started off with cocktail hour and a big silent auction. Then, went into a sit-down dinner with an award presentation and then dancing afterwards.

**BD:** I think the two biggest things were – or three biggest were the initial interations we had a Brown speaker one year and Susan West (ph), there were between 400 and 500 people there. And then, Lancaster I think, the first Lancaster –

**EM:** 2009, Lancaster. Very large.

**MK:** Wasn't Govenor Rundell at one of them?

**BD:** Yes, when he was running first time.

**LM:** That's something I don't miss.

**EM:** I bet you don't.

**BD:** I bet not too. It's a lot of work.

**EM:** [chuckles] From staff point of view FAB it is a...big lift.

**BB:** The staff here is who organizes it?

**EM:** And volunteers. But it's a tremendous amount of work.

**MK:** The board has to really trip into volunteer hours – it's a huge effort.

**BD:** It's okay in the years when you – well, I shouldn't say it's okay – it makes it worthwhile in the years where it's a great event and it raises a lot of money. But, a few years it might've been a good event and didn't raise much money.

**BL:** Anyone else have any final thoughts?

**EM:** Well, thank you for doing this!

**MK:** There's a lot of history that's gotta be archived, besides the individual, but like the board, who was on the first board, you know we have minutes.

**LM:** I know we've given a lot, when I was working here back in those days, that's how we would – I mean we started, when we would go through files like we're going to get rid of this or give it to the history project.