

The Samara Fund

Isolation poses a substantial challenge to building community, especially for those who already experience significant marginalization. Vermont, which leads the country with the greatest concentration of rural residents, also has the sixth-highest proportion (5.2%) of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer adults.

The Samara Fund fosters connections with organizations that serve LGBTQ communities throughout the state. It supports life-changing experiences that promote feelings of connectedness and identity affirmation, which is especially important for rural LGBTQ adults and youth who often face deeper feelings of isolation. In 2018, the Samara Fund awarded 15 grants, including one to Burlington-based Outright Vermont, an organization that collaborates with LGBTQ communities statewide to offer Friday Night Groups for LGBTQ youth.

Outright Vermont also hosts a six-day residential camp held every summer at Common Ground Center in Starksboro. "Part of what is hard for queer and trans youth, especially in a rural state like Vermont, is isolation," says Outright's Executive Director Dana Kaplan. "You've got isolation based on your identity on top of isolation based on your geographic location."

Camp Outright welcomes all at-risk LGBTQ youth, including queer and trans youth of color and trans femme youth. Gender-liberated spaces and cabins selected by gender identity don't force youth to choose in a way that doesn't include them. Throughout the week, campers and staff leave each other little messages of affirmation in a "Heck Yeah Bag" that each camper takes home as a reminder of self-worth.

"Your internal sense of belonging and connection is the best suicide prevention," adds Dana. "So much of what queer and trans youth are having to do on a daily basis is navigate a world that either doesn't include them or tells them that who they are is wrong. When you get a week in a supportive community, it's really transformational."

The Samara Fund's philanthropy supports deep dives like this into identity affirmation for rural LGBTQ youth and adults, and it upholds a critical position of funding for LGBTQ communities across the state.

The Samara Fund has distributed over \$350,000 to LGBTQ individuals and organizations.

