



## Library Recognition Award 2023 Nomination Form

Please answer the following 3 questions using this form. Make your answers descriptive and concise. Sell your project or service! This written part of the application should be no more than 2 pages total. You may add up to 2 additional pages of support materials – photos, publicity materials, news stories, etc. The overall application package may not exceed 4 pages total.

I nominate the Gloversville Public Library for the **2023** MVLS Library Recognition Award.

Project Title: School's Out

Submitted by: Valerie Acklin/Gloversville Public Library

Submit nomination via email to [kclingan@mvl.info](mailto:kclingan@mvl.info) by Friday, September 1, 2023

1. Describe what you did. Where and when did activities & services take place? Who were your partners?

School's Out is a carefully-crafted program that addresses the limited opportunities for queer students to gather safely, both for entertainment and mental health purposes, in our area. It is designed to provide afterschool meetings, twice monthly, at the Gloversville Public Library. The first monthly meeting is designated as a time to make friends, explore group activities, play games, and enjoy screenings of films that portray positive queer themes. The second meeting each month is a social worker-led discussion group, where participants can talk confidently and confidentially about the challenges in their lives, and both receive support from and give support to their peers. To ensure that this support group is led by a counselor experienced with queer populations, we have established an ongoing partnership with the Pride Center of the Capital Region. We've marketed the program through social media and the guidance departments at both Gloversville Middle School and Gloversville High School, as well as through the Pride Center of the Capital Region. Thanks to social media sharing and word-of-mouth recommendations, the program has grown significantly since its inception, and that growth has brought with it increased opportunities to establish new partnerships. We now also work with the Captain Street Outreach Project, which targets housing insecure youth throughout Fulton and Montgomery Counties. Since getting kicked out of the only home they've ever known is a reality many of our attendees have either already faced or live in fear of facing, this connection is vital. In addition, our collaboration with Planned Parenthood of Greater New York has provided attendees with pronoun pins, a variety of different pride flags representing an array of gender identifications and sexual orientations, as well as general health and wellness materials. We have also collaborated with Hannaford, which has donated food for our queer events. And coming up at a meeting this fall, we're scheduled to host a discussion about sexual health in conjunction with Albany Medical Center. We look forward to broadening our reach in the future and connecting with additional community stakeholders.

2. What community need did your project address? Why did you develop this activity or service?

In early 2022, our Teen Services Librarian, Lex Lanza, heard from some secondary school-aged patrons who identify as queer or questioning that there were few safe local spaces for them to meet other queer kids and talk about their lives. This was especially troubling to them, as our rural area is quite conservative and many felt isolated, living in fear of being outed to disapproving family and friends. The high school had a diversity club, but it wasn't LGBTQIA-specific, and it was barely active. Hanging out at neighborhood shops, eateries, or parks risked being overheard and having word get back to their families. So, these young adults gravitated to the library to explore books, magazines, and the Internet for information and stories that mirror their experiences – without parents looking over their shoulders or looking through their online search histories. Identifying a need, based on those conversations, we decided to create a library-based community for these students, who felt unwelcome in most other venues. After months of extensive research and reaching out to other organizations across the country that provide programming for this population, we designed and implemented our own support and social group for LGBTQIA+ teens and allies.

3. Describe how this project or service made a difference in your community using statistics, stories & photos.

Who benefited and how did they benefit? Will you continue this activity or service? Why?

The first meeting was held in January 2024 and participation has increased exponentially since then. When it began, we sometimes had just one or two teens, but now we regularly see 12-15 students at each meeting. And we are finding that they come from across the Mohawk Valley. In addition to Gloversville and Johnstown residents, we have attendees from Northville, who travel to the library because they feel that their school is becoming less tolerant of queer students. We have students from Mayfield, where there is no queer student group. We also have numerous homeschooled teens from around the area, who feel they can no longer attend school in person due to verbal and physical bullying. And just this month, we have been contacted by a Middleburgh mother, in Schoharie County, eager to see if her non-binary teen can attend School's Out, even though the family lives over an hour away, as her child feels completely isolated and without peers in their hometown. Of course, we welcome all teens who wish to join us!

Evidence of the program's impact comes from participants themselves,\* as well as their allies. When asked why the program is important to them, members at a recent meeting replied: "This program helps me get out of my house and talk to real people," "You can make friends here who are just like you," and "This club makes me feel welcome and accepted, it makes me feel happy and I love it here." Similarly, one caregiver expressed appreciation by saying her child often grumbles about going to therapy, but won't let anything stand in the way of attending School's Out. And when the kids didn't want to lose touch with each other over the long, and often isolating, summer vacation, we extended what was originally a school-year program and now hold it year-round.

All of this exceeds our expectations and speaks to the severe lack of services for LGBTQIA+ youth in our area. And while School's Out doesn't solve all the problems this population faces, it has provided a support network and a stable place where teens can be their authentic selves, as well as an opportunity to forget their worries, have fun, and connect with others. Sometimes the room is filled with laughter, other times there are tears, but whatever is happening, these teens are experiencing it together with peers who accept them unconditionally. That's not something many of them could say before the program started. We are eager to continue School's Out as long as there are teens who want to attend, as we believe that everyone deserves a safe space where they feel welcomed and valued for who they are.

*\*NOTE: For the privacy and safety of our participants (who are minors) and to ensure that no one who attends School's Out is unintentionally outed, we cannot identify attendees by name when including quotations. For the same reasons, we do not photograph participants in any way or seek out press coverage, but instead take pictures of the activities and projects, and our School's Out space.*

Return via email to Kate Clingan at [kclingan@mvlis.info](mailto:kclingan@mvlis.info) by  
Friday, September 1, 2023

# SCHOOL'S OUT

## **Connecting Queer Teens & Allies**

2nd & 4th Mondays of Each Month  
3-4:30 PM @ Gloversville Public Library  
For Grades 6-12

**Looking for a place to make friends & fit in,  
laugh & learn, become a leader & find support?  
Then drop in to School's Out!**

### **Funday Mondays (2nd Mondays):**

Relax and hang out  
with feel-good films,  
food, and friends!



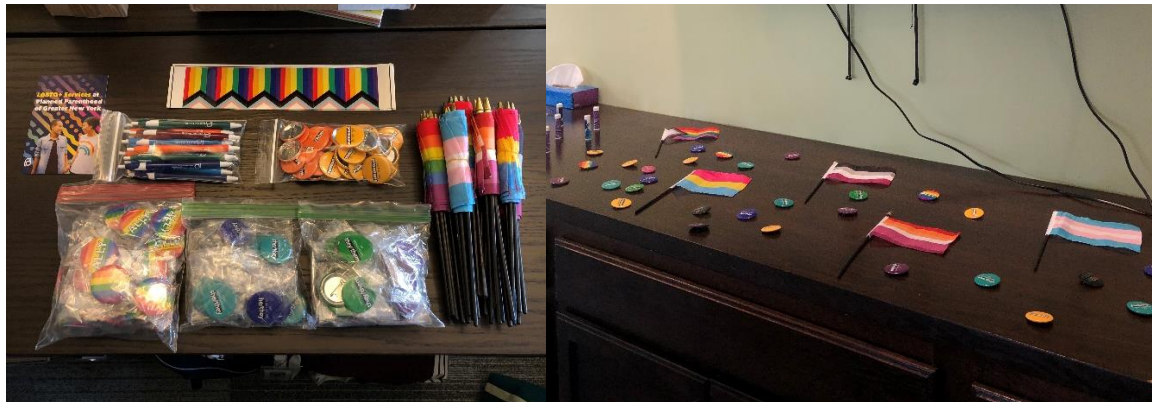
### **Emotional Support Queers (4th Mondays):**

Share, listen, and  
show support. Led by  
The Pride Center of  
the Capital Region.



Questions? Call (518) 725-2819

or email [gpl@mvl.info](mailto:gpl@mvl.info).



### Scenes From School's Out

Above: Pride giveaways from PPGNY and the Pride Center of the Capital Region

Below: "Calming Craft Day" bookmark creations and a display of new additions to our queer graphic novel collection

