

MEDIA RELEASE

QUEER YOUTH DIVE INTO AQUEERIUM Mardi Gras Youth Festival Bigger and Better in 2010

20 February – 7 March 2010: Various Venues/Free Events

4 February 2010: Returning for its third successful year The Mardi Gras Youth Festival (MGYF) is set to set tongues wagging and hearts beating with an eclectic series of events, performances and parties.

New for 2010, the flagship event of the festival is AQUEERIUM – a full day event with a decidedly aquatic theme. Aqueerium is tank full of workshops, performance, art, music and discussions for young people of diverse gender and sexuality.

It's a Finding Nemo-style adventure for young queers across Sydney according to Rebecca Reynolds, the Managing Director of organiser Twenty10. "With this year's aquatic theme, we wanted to say to queer young people 'while it seems scary out there, you can come and explore safely with us and see the world is really exciting and colourful'."

Returning for this year's festival is 21 Down – the hugely successful under-21 Mardi Gras party at top Sydney venue Slide. Now in its fourth year, this drug and alcohol free event is presented by ACON and Courtney Act and gives queer youth the opportunity to party safely and kick off their Mardi Gras festivities with a bang!

Between these two brilliant events sits a diverse festival program with something for all queer youth to love: From a tour through the secret history of Sydney's gay communities to a 'Fashion House' perfect for conceiving and creating the perfect Mardi Gras Parade outfit or banner.

Rebecca Reynolds continues: "Celebrating gender and sexual diversity is about so much more than just partying, sometimes young people feel like small fish in a big pond when it comes to the whole Mardi Gras festival – or even just a fish out of water in finding events that match their age and interests... this festival makes the pond smaller, meaning young people are more likely to find others that are likeminded!"

Supporting this event, Festival Executive Producer, Danielle Harvey of New Mardi Gras said: "The Mardi Gras Youth Festival is the gateway for young people to get their first taste of what the whole Mardi Gras Festival is all about – fun, education, meeting new people and celebrating who and what you are. We hope that as these young people get older they look back on their first Mardi Gras experience via the accessible and non-confronting Youth Festival and think 'Gosh I'm glad I did that!'".

ACON Chief Executive Officer, Nicolas Parkhill, agreed "having a program of Mardi Gras events specifically for young people ensures they can participate in the festivities in a range of safe and supportive environments. This year, we're delighted to be providing a range of opportunities for young GLBT people to improve their health and wellbeing and we look forward to working with Twenty10, New Mardi Gras and our other Festival partners to provide an enjoyable experience for all".

Further details on the festival can be found at [twenty10.org.au/youth festival](http://twenty10.org.au/youth-festival).

MARDI GRAS YOUTH FESTIVAL 2010

Events Overview.

For full venue details visit www.twenty10.org.au/youthfestival

21 DOWN

20 February 1.00pm – 5.00pm/Slide, Oxford Street/Free

21 Down returns to launch the Mardi Gras Youth Festival. Hosted by Courtney Act and featuring some of Sydney's best DJs. Produced by ACON.

THE FANTABULOUS WALK OF HISTORICAL AND MODERN CURIOSITIES

21 February 10.30am – 12.30pm/ Outdoors in Newtown/Free

An exploration of the rich, queer history of the Inner West for young LGBT people. The walk begins in Newtown and ends at Fair Day. Produced by ACON.

MARDI GRAS 2010 FASHION HOUSE

23 February 4.00pm – 8.00pm/ St George Youth Services, Miranda/Free

Create a costume or design a banner at this pre-Parade Fashion House event. Produced by the GLYSSN Project.

THE BIRDS AND THE BIRDS: SEX(Y) ED FOR SAPPHIC SISTERS

24 February 6.00pm – 9.30pm/Red Rattler Theater, Marrickville/Free

The Launch of the Lesbian Sex Workbook featuring DJs, performances and more. A drug and alcohol free event. Produced by ACON.

WEST REFLECTS: YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN MARDI GRAS

25 February 5.00pm – 9.00pm/ The Warehouse Youth Centre, Penrith/Free

A visual display of photographs, media reports and costumes from the past eight years; from various youth projects in Sydney's West. Produced by Family Planning NSW.

NORTHERN LIGHTS

3 March 5.30pm – 9.00pm/ Hype, Hornsby/Free

A chance for young LGBT people to meet, make friends and exchange spooky stories during a evening walk in Hornsby's bushland. Produced by Twenty10.

LATE NITE SHOPPING

4 March 7.00pm – 10.00pm/Shopfront Contemporary Arts Centre, Carlton/Free

From drag acts to 80s dance routines, performance poetry to roller skates: Late Nite Shopping is a under-25 event for budding performers and those who just want to watch and have fun. Produced by Shopfront Theatre.

AQUEERIUM

6 March 10.00am – 10.30pm/ Australian Theatre for Young People, Hickson Road/Free

Workshops, performance, art, music and discussions for young LGBT people – allowing them to explore their gender and sexuality in a fun, safe setting. A full day of faux-underwater adventure! Produced by Twenty10.

FISH OUT OF WATER

7 March 10.00pm – 4.00pm/ Twenty10, Newtown/Free

Chill-out after the fun of Aqueerium with an afternoon of food, performance and music. Produced by Twenty10.

-ENDS-

Note to Editors:

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About Twenty10

Twenty10 is a not-profit, community based organization that supports and works with young people of diverse genders and sexualities, their families and communities in NSW to help queer youth accept themselves and shine.

Twenty10 began 28 years ago as a crisis service helping young people who were homeless and has grown to provide welfare services, social support, skills training, arts projects and community development.

Young People Stories

These stories are written by three young people who are part of the Twenty10 community and participants in the Mardi Gras Youth Festival.

Hannah's Story

I use Twenty10 more for the events than the services. It's about the people I meet for me, I have met some of my best friends at Twenty10.

I find the Saturday groups are a good way to meet people and it has broadened my horizons to people that I would never have met at school or in everyday life. I found Twenty10 first through the Hornsby group, then started coming to Saturday's at Newtown.

We do a lot of cool stuff at Saturday groups. I participated in a theatre project where a theatre guy came in and over a couple of months built a piece with us which we performed at the Belvoir theatre.

I was also in the Mardi Gras festival last year, we made a "Place to Be" float and marched with our personal slogans of what we wanted to be.

I would recommend Twenty10 to any friends that were questioning their sexuality and also so they could meet people they wouldn't meet normally.

The Youth Festival is a good opportunity to meet people, have fun and learn about historical gay culture. 21Down was really good last year as it was an opportunity to go into a real dance club with gay and straight friends, and it was drug and alcohol free.

I think a lot of people don't know there are events for young people and its really cool to have special stuff for young people.

**For photos or further interview with Hannah,
call David on 0466 60 2010 or david@twenty10.org.au**

Georgia's Story

Last year was my first Mardi Gras Youth Festival. I went to 21 Down, which is the dance party that is held in late afternoon, on Oxford Street. I really liked the way people embraced each others' differences: people were so friendly and kind. I think this is in essence what Mardi Gras does. It enables people, whose differences normally set them apart from their peers, to see they're not that unusual.

Last year I marched in the parade with Amnesty International. It was such a thrilling night. It was a night that celebrated diversity, not just difference in sexuality, but all the peculiarities that makes us unique as human beings. So as a young, gay woman with a disability, I felt I was accepted for exactly who I was and I felt ordinary for that night, which was surprisingly wonderful.

I first heard of Twenty10 from a friend. I had asked her how I could meet more queer people and she took me to Twenty10.

Twenty10 is a place, where upon entering, you instantly feel at home. It is a nurturing and generous place in a way that I find really reassuring. I am often struck at how the workers interact with young people: they operate with no pretense, or hidden agendas, they just want to support young people in whichever way they can, but also are genuine and admit fault. I really feel that Twenty10 is a thoroughly compassionate service.

By participating in some of the things Twenty10 offers, I have grown enormously as a person. Meeting like-minded people, has made me more confident and accepting of my own sexuality and identity. I also have met some amazing people and had some extraordinary experiences. For example, I went on a trip to China with a friend I had

met at an art class at Twenty10. Without her, I couldn't even dream of going somewhere so far away and experiencing the things I experienced.

Currently, I am still struggling through high school, I don't really have a clear direction for my life. I always have wanted to work with people. I think organisations like Twenty10 have fed this desire, because I see the good it does in people's lives.

One highlight of my time at Twenty10 would have to be a camp in January 2009: We were doing the high rope course, we all were cheering each other on. When my turn came, a friend did it with me, to help me if I needed it, as my balance is not very good. Everyone was encouraging me to keep going.

If someone was coming to Twenty10 or a Mardi Gras Youth Festival event for the first time, I would hope they found it to be inclusive and accepting and I guess that it exceeded their expectations. I also would like them to come away feeling like they have made a few friends and had a really lovely time.

**For photos or further interview with Georgia,
call David on 0466 60 2010 or david@twenty10.org.au**

Ian's Story

I found out about Twenty10 two years ago. At that time I was homeless and there wasn't a lot of family support. I had no idea there was help available for things like getting youth housing, food and support.

I found out about Twenty10 through my sister who worked overseas in social services.

Twenty10 provided me with things that other young people might get easily, things like accommodation, washing clothes, educational support and community activities. Twenty10 helps homeless young people to function normally; to be able to go to work and live life properly.

The key for me is the services available here. I know with Twenty10 I won't starve, I can wash my clothes and I can get help with things like Centrelink or the law.

Twenty10 provides a base and a foundation for my life here. It is a place to meet other youth in the same circumstances so you can relate to people.

I would recommend Twenty10 to any young person that feels they can't relate, or doesn't have many friends or access to family support and housing.

I would recommend it to any young person who is struggling, and of any sexuality, I've seen straight people welcomed here. You feel safe inside the Twenty10 building and have people to talk to.

I think the work of Twenty10 is imperative for the young gay community in Sydney as they need a place to feel safe. It is really important for young gay people to feel safe and have a safe place to go to as there is a lot out there that isn't safe and that is easy to fall into.

Twenty10 provides a good way to meet other gay people, it is very social and you are meeting them just for fun and support, there is nothing else implied or obligated – it is safe. Also the activities here demonstrates to young people that there is more to being gay than being same-sex attracted. Gay people are like everyone, we are also into arts and culture. There is a lot more to it than just attraction and Twenty10 shows that.

It would have been good to know about Twenty10 when I was 16 as my only option then was Oxford Street which was not the safest place. I think if you are at Twenty10 there is less chance of you getting into trouble because the workers here are dedicated and have lot of life experience so they can identify when things are going wrong and try to help.

**For photos or further interview with Ian,
call David on 0466 60 2010 or david@twenty10.org.au**

