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Imagine this: Me at nineteen years old, very young, new-to-activism (and much more punk) approaching a table full of pamphlets and colorful rainbows at a queer event at [Hendrix College](#) [1] in Conway, Arkansas.



Hendrix was a neighboring school to my public university, the University of Central Arkansas, and the school's GSA, [Unity](#) [2], was known for throwing amazing events for queer and allied students. **Randi Romo, Executive Director**, of the [Center for Artistic Revolution](#) [3] (CAR) introduced herself to me and explained that her non-profit organization worked for ?fairness and equality for all Arkansans.?

?How do I sign up?? I asked eagerly. She handed me a clipboard for my e-mail address and said enthusiastically, ?You're in!? Within months, I became a regular at CAR's meetings and events. CAR believed that all oppressions were connected and encourages its youth leaders to utilize arts and activism to dismantle those oppressions. The CAR youth participated in anti-war demonstrations, called for the ending of Native Americans as mascots at Arkansas State University, marched in Conway Pride Parade, and made a lot of amazing art with a collective of diverse people. The most important thing I learned was that youth had a voice in the present ? not just in the future.



Now as a staff member at GSA Network, I am excited that CAR is a member of the [National Association of GSA Networks](#) ^[4] this month, along with Kentucky's Louisville Youth Group. The National Association is proud to add these two kick-ass Southern organizations that care deeply about youth to a growing network of providers and organizations that serve GSAs across the country.

I called up Randi to talk to her about the exciting news of CAR joining the National Association. ?When CAR first started there were no active GSAs in the state - now there are fourteen!? she exclaimed. ?We're thrilled to join the National Association, as this would be a formal hub that GSAs can connect with to further their viability and sustainability. They can help us create more GSAs across the state.?



In 2007, CAR formally launched its youth program, **Diverse Youth for Social Change** (DYSC) and started holding weekly meetings. Recently, DYSC youth, **Devon Beardon**, won the 2008 [Collin Higgins Youth Courage Award](#) ^[5] for her GSA activism at the historic Central High School in Little Rock. Last year, CAR opened a drop-in LGBTQ youth space in honor of Lucille Hamilton, an activist transgender youth who passed away in 2009. DYSC continues to work across lines of race, class, gender, ability and more by participating in events like the Little Rock Martin Luther King, Jr. parade and by supporting the Arkansas Dream Act. By joining the National Association of GSA Networks, CAR will continue its successful journey by connecting to 34 other organizations across the U.S. that serve youth in GSAs.

I know I am but one of many youth whose hearts they have touched. I can't wait to see what's in store for them as they help embolden this movement. Randi is also happy to work with the many youth across Arkansas and the nation. ?Watching all the amazing national work that is going on, we knew this was the perfect time to take the next step.?

Congratulations CAR!

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Links

[1] <http://www.hendrix.edu>

[2] <http://hendrixunity.blogspot.com/>

[3] <http://artisticrevolution.org>

[4] <http://gsanetwork.org/get-involved/change-nation/national-association-gsa-networks>

[5] <http://www.colinhiggins.org/courageawards/profiles.cfm>