

# WHAT WE DO



Based in the Washington, DC metro area, SMYAL supports and empowers lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth ages 6-24. Through youth leadership, SMYAL creates opportunities for LGBTQ youth to build self-confidence, develop critical life skills, and engage their peers and community through service and advocacy. Committed to social change, SMYAL builds, sustains, and advocates for programs, policies, and services that LGBTQ youth need as they grow into adulthood.

## Who We Serve

SMYAL serves queer and trans youth ages 6-24 through a range of affirming programs, services, and community spaces. We also work in the community to ensure that LGBTQ youth have access to safe and supportive spaces beyond our youth center.

## Leadership Development

Our leadership programs are designed to equip young people with the skills, resources, and support they need to enact change as the leaders of tomorrow and today.

### Leadership Training and Conferences

SMYAL builds the capacity of young LGBTQ leaders through facilitating workshops for **schools, GSA clubs, and youth groups**. In addition, SMYAL hosts an annual **Activist Camp** where youth explore and build strategies as they learn how to be movement leaders. In 2020, this became our first virtual **Rise Up! Youth Organizing Conference**. **Leading with Pride** is an annual conference hosted in partnership with DC Public Schools that convenes 100+ LGBTQ student leaders to network, lead, and attend workshops.

### Peer Health Fellowship Program

Peer Health Fellows are a select group of youth who are trained in safer sex methods, HIV prevention, and LGBTQ sex education. In turn, Fellows educate other queer and trans youth about issues related to sexual and mental health. Peer Health Fellows serve their community as sources of information, role models, and trusted friends by facilitating workshops for schools, community-based organizations, and the SMYAL community.

### Youth Leadership Awards

In 2015, SMYAL launched the Youth Leadership Awards which seek to recognize the perseverance it takes to be an out leader. The awards pay tribute to the challenges many LGBTQ youth face as leaders in their communities while recognizing their work. Each award comes with up to \$5,000 in financial aid to help reduce the financial burden of continuing their education.

### Youth Fellowships

The paid SMYAL Youth Fellowship program is designed to offer queer and trans youth the opportunity to gain professional development experience working within a non-profit. During the fellowship, Fellows create and facilitate programs, lead trainings for community partners, and bolster their public speaking skills, all while receiving mentorship from SMYAL staff.

## Support for Homeless LGBTQ Youth

SMYAL provides housing and support for 60+ LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness through our comprehensive and affirming Youth Housing Program. SMYAL's housing services consist of 18-24 month transitional programs, an extended transitional housing program that supports youth up to 6 years, a Rapid Rehousing Program, and a partnership with the DC Department of Health that ties healthcare and housing. Across our programs, residents are provided with mental health counseling, employment navigation, life skills training and more to support a their transition from homelessness to self sufficiency.

## Safe Places to Be Who You Are

SMYAL works to ensure that queer and trans youth have safe spaces to be their authentic selves.

### Virtual Drop-in Programs

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, SMYAL has shifted all our drop-in center programming to virtual platforms including Zoom and Discord. SMYAL's virtual youth programs are supportive and affirming spaces where queer and trans youth can build community. Weekly programs include identity-based chat spaces, topic deep dives, and kick-back nights.

### Little SMYALS

Little SMYALS provides dedicated programming to LGBTQ youth ages 6-12 in a safe and welcoming environment. Programming includes art and crafts, enrichment activities, story time, all-around fun as well as support services for youth and parents.

## Community Outreach and Education

SMYAL works in communities to provide community education to over 2,000 teachers, social workers, youth workers, and medical professionals. Our trainings seek to enhance culturally competent services and safe spaces for LGBTQ youth. SMYAL also advocates on behalf of LGBTQ youth to government leaders, stakeholders, and the community.

## Affirming Mental Health Counseling

Opened in October 2021, SMYAL's Clinical Services Department provides up to 50 LGBTQ youth a week with bilingual affirming and accessible mental health counseling. Services include individual therapy, group sessions, and alternative therapies such as trauma-informed yoga and sound healing. All services are open to LGBTQ youth ages 6-24 at no cost. In addition, the program trains clinical interns to be the next generation of affirming therapists.