

LGBTQ event for Waco youth brings community together

By Skylla Mumana.

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Christen Weaver and the Waco Pride Network held a youth after-party for LGBTQ youth in the local area. The event took place Saturday night at Rogue Media Network.

The youth after-party was an extension of the [Out on the Brazos](#) celebration that took place earlier that afternoon. Out on the Brazos is hosted each year by the Waco Pride Network and celebrates the Greater Waco LGBTQ community and its allies. The day is filled with food, musical performances and business vendors and takes place in October of each year to commemorate [National Coming Out Day](#).

[Christen Weaver](#), an LGBTQ youth advocate for Central Texas, initially went to the Waco Pride Network and expressed to them her idea of creating a youth after-party. Weaver said she has always been active with the LGBTQ youth in the area, and is passionate about advocating for their rights and mental health. Weaver said she aims to continuously provide outlets and support systems for them, as well as providing opportunities and resources for them to establish themselves within the community and in life.

“I feel like, if you don’t have people that support you in your gender identity, in your sexuality, in the questions you may have, then you deteriorate,” Weaver said. “I’m interested in having a place for queer people to congregate and be together and for it to be centered around outreach and fellowship.”

After numerous emails and meetings and acquiring both donations and loans, Weaver said she was able to put everything together, making it the first time an event for LGBTQ youth has been put on at Waco Pride. Through the help of Rogue Media, Waco Pride Network and McLennan Community College’s Gender and Sexuality Alliance, Weaver said she was able to get the word out for the event and have a space to set up.

According to its [website](#), Waco Pride Network is a nonprofit organization that works to unite, commemorate and celebrate the LGBTQ community of Waco through events, volunteer work and community outreach. Waco Pride Network commits itself to holding community events throughout the year, all while engaging with educational institutions within the Waco area. With their largest event currently being Out on the Brazos pride festival, Waco Pride Network continues to educate the public on LGBTQ rights, and expand its influence throughout the Waco community.

Jules, better known as Nokima Shroom, is a performer and member of The Dragery House of Legendary Children, another passion of Weaver's that showcases drag-cabaret performances spearheaded by local LGBTQ youth. Shroom served as the master of ceremonies for the youth after-party event and noted how important it was to her that events such as these be available to the Waco community.

"There are so many people in the LGBTQ+ community in Waco who might feel like they're alone," Shroom said. "These are events and places and spaces to let them know that they're not."

Perseus Krnavek, an attendee and member of the McLennan Community College Gender and Sexuality Alliance, said they have faced firsthand persecution and mistreatment due to their sexuality and gender. Krnavek said they feel that safe spaces for people to freely express their gender identities and sexuality are important, and they hope to see more of those spaces in Waco's immediate future.

"It's really nice to have a place to go to where I'm no different than everyone else," Krnavek said. "Normally when I go out in Texas I get stared at because of the way I look and the way I dress. Today I looked the same as everybody else there and I felt really accepted."

Weaver said she aims to consistently hold events, such as this, monthly for the LGBTQ youth in the Greater Waco area, and hopes that more people will want to join her in doing so. She wants to help propel forward change in all communities and normalize gender and sexuality differences in the world, Weaver said.

"Maybe someday we'll get to the point where we don't say 'gay marriage' or 'look at that cute gay couple,' but just 'marriage' and 'couple,'" Weaver said. "It should all just be equal."