

Astraea LESBIAN FOUNDATION FOR JUSTICE

threads

Welcome to *threads* Winter/Spring 09, the print issue of our new online publication, *eThreads*. In these pages, read inspiring stories featuring Astraea's incredible community of grantees and donors, spanning the globe from South Africa to Texas. Then, visit us online to view the photo galleries and videos that bring these stories to life. Connecting communities is at the core of our work, and we hope that *threads* will strengthen, even further, our connection with you.

Lala Camps Launch a Movement

In a country where formal organizations are a relatively new idea and public demonstrations are illegal, the Chinese *lala* (lesbian, bi, and trans) leadership trainings—the Lala Camps—are setting off a seismic shift. In 2007, the first Lala Camp moved lalas from isolation to connection. Then in October 2008 a series of five regional Lala Camps empowered 1,000 lalas from 35 cities with support, strategies and vision. From Anshan, a rural area where organizers sell blood sausage to raise money for their activities, to metropolitan Beijing, home of the country's only lesbian print magazine and largest lala group, the landscape of lala activism in China was fundamentally changed.



Photo by Ling

“I am hugely obliged to the Lala Camps for the knowledge that I have been given, the personal relations that I have established and the help and support that were provided in the formation of our local lala group. We would not have been able to develop to the extent we have without the support from Lala Camps and Astraea.”

—Miss S, Guangxi Lesbian Coalition

The Lala Camps were conceived at Astraea's Giving and Activism Retreat in 2006, when seven Mandarin-speaking activists envisioned an empowered network of leaders across the region. Police stormed the last large-scale lala gathering in Beijing just two years before, so the 2007 Lala Camp astounded even the organizers by bringing together more than one hundred activists from 20 cities in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the U.S. who traveled a combined total of more than 600 hours to attend.

Built on the success in 2007, the 2008 trainings invigorated activists in Chengdu, Kunming, Beijing, Anshan and Shanghai. Participants worked from early morning to late at night, delving into leadership trainings, heated discussions, and human rights strategy sessions. Organizers forged connections with ally organizations in each region and held public events showcasing lala history and culture. The momentum continued from city to city, finally culminating in the creation of the first national lala organizing body: the Chinese Lala Alliance.

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The Power of Movements in Cape Town



Fikile Vilakazi, director of Coalition of African Lesbians, leading the 1 in 9 March. Organized by the 1 in 9 Campaign (only one out of every nine rape survivors report the attack to the police), the march called for an end to gender-based violence. Several hundred strong, conference attendees joined local organizers to deliver a memorandum to end violence to Premier Lynne Brown of the Western Cape. *Photo by Melissa Hoskins*

An Astraea grantee partner from Meem, based in Lebanon, stood at the podium at the opening plenary of the 11th Association of Women’s Rights in Development conference, *The Power of Movements*, held in Cape Town, South Africa. In a speech deftly weaving humor with gravity, she asserted to nearly 2,000 feminist activists from 144 countries that the feminist movement cannot call itself “feminist” without lesbians and transgender people. She urged participants to choose from the more than 160 sessions and engage with something they knew nothing about. The four days of plenary speeches, interactive sessions, workshops and debates that followed brought home the conference theme: “When people struggle together, what was once unimaginable suddenly becomes possible.”

This is exactly what Astraea’s work is about. Central to Astraea’s mission is the

collaboration necessary to build movements, whether linking grantees and donors across regions or pooling donations large and small to make a real impact. Thanks to Astraea colleagues, staff, and nearly 40 grantee partners from every continent, LGBTI people had more visibility at the forum than ever before. We were invigorated by the insight of colleagues and the breadth and depth of the global movement. Astraea grantee partners led provocative sessions on issues ranging from the politics of translation to the struggles of queer women in South Asia. Astraea collaborated with colleagues and donors on panels about women in conflict and social-justice-feminist funding that is at the core of Astraea’s work.

In between the formal discussions, personal connections built bridges. Over breakfast, Astraea staff began a casual conversation with staff from a women’s organization in

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2008 Lala Camp Tour – 5 Regions



Bin Xu, executive director of Common Language, (the Astraea grantee partner that led coordination of the camps) says, “The 2007 camp was a turning point for many people. After the camp, I think everyone from mainland China told me, it was like a dream . . . Lesbian activism in China put on a new face.”

One new face is 19-year-old Miss S, who returned home and launched Guangxi

Lesbian Coalition. With funding from Astraea, GLC grew in a year from a one-city core group of youth to a multi-city network of more than a hundred members. They are undeterred by a local government ban on LGBT topics and crackdowns on organizing. Through a hotline, an online magazine, a lesbian basketball tournament, and support meetings in urban and remote areas, GLC is

actively building a meaningful and vibrant community for its members.

Today, thanks in large part to the Lala Camps, there are nearly 25 lala organizations across China—a fivefold increase in two years. Miss S’s organization is part of an emerging LBT movement that is gaining momentum nationally.

Bin says of the growing swell of activism, “The change is so obvious. I’m very happy Astraea is a part of this change in China.”



Bin Xu, executive director of Common Language, speaks about the Lala Camps. Watch an interview with Bin online at eThreads.org. *Photo by Febe*



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Angola. Questions about LGBTI lives were passionately discussed in Portuguese. Later, these same women attended an intense and heated session by Astraea grantee partner Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL) "Speaking Out Against Homophobic Hate in Africa." The session laid bare how crucial and desperately needed, even among feminists, is the daily work of Astraea grantee partners and colleagues around the globe. It became even clearer how fundamentalisms seek to divide us by concealing our connections.

After the session, in a demonstration of inter-regional movement building, CAL mobilized a large contingent to attend "Towards Building an Arab LGBT Movement." The session was so full that the doors were left open to accommodate those listening from the hallway. Astraea grantee partners Aswat, an organization of Palestinian gay women, and Meem

shared both personal accounts and sharp analyses of the isolation, violence, and little access to resources that they face.

As a snapshot of the global women's movement, the AWID forum was a whirlwind four days that forged and deepened connections across regions, races, genders, abilities, sexualities and classes—all of which are issues that drive Astraea's work. The celebration of accomplishments and the recognition of all that still needs to be done only increased everyone's resolve to keep working for the world we know is possible—if we continue in our commitment to make it together. 🌱



At the AWID forum, FIRE (Feminist International Radio Endeavor) interviewed Astraea Executive Director Katherine Acey and Samira, of Aswat—Palestinian Gay Women, an Astraea grantee partner. Listen to the interview at eThreads.org.

Photo by Melissa Hoskins

Felicia Miller on Discovering Astraea

The world is getting smaller," says Felicia Miller, "If you don't pay attention to what's outside your world today, tomorrow it will be right in your own backyard." Felicia gives because Astraea "assists LGBTI individuals worldwide. Astraea is the lifeline for women and trans people literally fighting to exist."

"It takes all kinds of activism. Some people are organizers; some are movers and shakers on the ground. But it can't be done without the resources. Check-writing activists are just as important as all the others," Felicia says. Despite her demanding schedule—she is the regional human resource director for a Dallas hospital system, is active in her church and serves on several boards and LGBTI rights campaigns—she always makes sure the checks get out on time.

Felicia's belief in the importance of philanthropy brought her and her

partner, Katrina, to Astraea's *Giving and Activism Retreat* in Dallas in November 2006. The retreat was transformative. Felicia found a way to support LGBTI movements worldwide, and Katrina emerged invigorated by the possibilities of philanthropy. "When Katrina saw the struggles of some of these organizations that Astraea supports, it touched her heart and opened her mind about what giving can do. She saw the impact that she could make. It was a major change and coming together for the two of us. I've always felt that way, but at the retreat we got on the same page about philanthropy." Three years later, their connection to Astraea, and each other, has only deepened.

Philanthropy is a major way Felicia gives back. Raised in a family with deep roots in the NAACP and the struggle for the rights of African Americans and women, Felicia grew up understanding that "you



Felicia and Katrina. Photo by Jennifer Einhorn

are always in the position to give back something; whether it's money or time or prayers or encouragement, you have to give back in order to benefit from all of God's gifts." 🌱

Astraea's 2010 Giving and Activism Retreat is just around the corner. Stay tuned!

2009 Multi-Year Movement-Building Convening, San Antonio, TX



Photo by Melissa Hoskins

Astraea's *Multi-Year Movement-Building Initiative* makes significant grants over several years—money activists can count on to make a long-term impact. Each year, Astraea convenes this growing pool of grantee partners to share strategies, cement alliances, and collaborate to launch new initiatives.

Meet these smart and committed activists in the next issue of *eThreads*.

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THE NEXT ISSUE OF *eThreads*

- 1 LGBTI Latin American Movement: Astraea Gathers Activists in Peru
- 2 Esperanza Peace and Justice Center: Deep Roots for Justice
- 3 Lesbian Writers Fund Winners

And visit eThreads.org for more stories, photos and videos from this issue.

OUR MISSION

The Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice works for social, racial and economic justice in the U.S. and internationally. Our grantmaking and philanthropic advocacy programs help lesbians and allied communities challenge oppression and claim their human rights.

Astraea received the highest rating of four stars from Charity Navigator—an honor given to less than a quarter of America's nonprofits. For more information, visit charitynavigator.org.

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