

# the documentary

## Ugly Ducklings: An Overview

The *Ugly Ducklings* Documentary Film is the final element of a statewide and national campaign to end bullying and harassment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth. Two local Maine organizations, Hardy Girls Healthy Women and Greater Waterville's Communities for Children and Youth successfully staged the Maine premier of the award-winning play *Ugly Ducklings* and from the play's development, produced an educational documentary film. The play, nominated for an American Theater Critic's Award, and written by Maine playwright Carolyn Gage, deals with the realities of bias-based harassment and youth suicide. The film, directed by Fawn Yacker whose cinematography credits include two Academy-Award winning films, documents the behind-the-scenes conversations with the 14 female actors - 13 youth and one adult - as they become the characters in the play. These conversations reveal the personal struggles of these girls, teens and young women, in overcoming homophobia and harassment in their schools, communities and families.

*Ugly Ducklings* the play, which provides the through-line for the film, examines the unhealthy turns that relationships between girls can take when they are not allowed their natural expression. Throughout the summer-camp the younger girls, their self-esteem still reinforced by the primacy of their relationships, increasingly come into contact with the older girls who have begun to turn against themselves and each other in their attempts to conform to the pressures of compulsory heterosexuality. The camp legend about a monster in the lake parallels the adult phobias about lesbianism, and, confronted with an attempted child suicide, campers and counselors are compelled to face their worst fears in the microcosmic world of the summer camp.

Against the backdrop of the play's messages and characters are the real girls, teens and women, who reveal their personal struggles of facing bias-based harassment and homophobia from their peers, communities, schools, and families.

The purpose of the Film is to educate both adults and youth about bias-based harassment and to aid families, schools, and communities who wish to openly support LGBTQ youth by initiating honest dialogue and creating safe and supportive environments. We want to educate and inspire people to take action against biased-based bullying and harassment. It is our hope that regardless of religious belief or political affiliation, we can all rally around the common goal of protecting children and youth from the harassment and violence that can lead to self-harm and suicide.

Our hope is that the Ugly Ducklings Project will help parents gain a better understanding of LGBTQ realities and will encourage them to seek proactive, respectful communication with their teen/s about issues facing LGBTQ youth. We want youth advocates to identify LGBTQ harassment and bias as an important issue for awareness and policy change. Ultimately, policy-makers will seek legislation and local protections through collaboration with and for LGBTQ youth in community and school environments and schools will incorporate the Ugly Ducklings Film with its accompanying Community Action Kit into their curriculum.

