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- Runaway, the *After Hours* every Saturday night here on KPFT 90.1 FM Houston. My name is Bruce Reeves.

- And I'm Jewel Gray.

- And we're your co-hosts this evening. Judy is also out in the lobby. And she's going to be talking to us in a little bit, I'm sure. And our guests this evening are Ron Sparks and Jon Hernandez, who are in the process of forming an organization that will be called SMYAL Houston, which is a new youth group, which will hopefully be getting underway sometime in early January or February at the latest. So, we'll be doing that at 1230. We've got "This Way Out" coming up at 1:30.

And this is our New Year's show. [SIGHs] Christmas is over. Well, it's sort of over. I guess this is the fourth day-- fifth day of Christmas, depending on how you count. So that's still kind of going on, and it's going on for another week, I guess. But this is our New Year's show. Then it is, everybody knows, Tuesday night's the big night. We all get to count down to midnight. But we're going to celebrate New Year's a little bit early here today.

We've got several things that we're doing. And we've got a little music for you right now. Ooh, that was the Rude Girls singing--

- I love that.

- --from their *Mixed Messages* album, "Rufus and Beverly." I just discovered that one today. It was quite interesting. I thought it would make a nice introduction to a new New Year's *After Hours* show, a show for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual--whatever-- community. We'll try to cover them all.

- Get everybody. Why don't we get everybody in?

- Get everybody in there. We want to be politically correct and all that fun stuff. We talked a little bit about last week during our Christmas show, that during the coming weeks we were going to have several new co-hosts here at *After Hours*. Jewel is with us tonight and a little under the weather. She's got the flu, we think. But she's going to hang in there and be a trooper anyway.

And next week, Kevin will be here with you and, I believe, with the two weeks after that a marathon. So there's going to be lots of us up here coming to you to ask us to support our programming here at KPFT. KPFT is public radio, and we depend on you for support. So, be trying to think about where you can find that dollar or two you can save. And we'll be asking you for that the second and third weekends in January.

Then Kay will be joining us as a co-host, and Mike as well. So we're going to have lots of people here to bring you lots of stuff for the gay and lesbian community. We hope it's something that you'll like. If you've got some ideas or something you'd like to see happen on *After Hours*, drop us a note. We're at 419 Lovett Boulevard in Houston, 77006. And we're open to your input. We really feel like this is a show for the gay and lesbian community. And we want to bring to you what you want to hear.

So if there's something we're not doing you'd like to see us do, give us a call.

- I'm looking forward to it. It's promising to be an exciting new show.

- It should be lots of fun. I think Judy's out there tonight answering calls. You can call at 526-4000 and leave a message. Tell Judy something you'd like to see in the show. She'd be glad to take your call. We do have Ron Sparks with us here in just a few minutes. And we'll be talking to him. And, all in all, we're getting there. Jewel why don't you tell us a little bit about Christmas dinner while I'm finding something to play here?

- Well, for those of you who heard me speak last week, we were anticipating a large crowd at the care center, where I participated in-- [CLEAR THROAT] excuse me-- in the Christmas dinner that we had there. It started at noon, and we fed about 120 people. It was an exciting day. Santa showed up. We had carolers and piano players and fine food and lots of friends. And it was really very, very nice, very, dare I say, homey.

And we really enjoyed putting it on at the [ ? Bering ? ] Care Center. And equally, as equal as I was at putting it on, I was just as grateful that it was over. It was a lot of responsibility, a lot of work. But we had a good time. And a lot of people were happy. And that made my Christmas.

- Well, good. That's what Christmas is all about, right?

- Right.

- Spending it with friends and family.

- Right -- doing the right thing.

- And of course, so many times in our community we have to make our own family.

- That's right.

- I know. I played a lot of Venus Envy from their Christmas album last week, and we're going to play one song a little bit later that I think is still applicable, even this week. But right now, we're going to listen to a little Michael Callen from his *Purple Heart* album.

Erasure, from *The Circus* album, singing "The Circus." And before that, we had Michael Callen, from his *Purple Heart* album, singing "Where the Boys Are." And coming up now, we've got Romanovsky and Phillips doing "Outfield Blues." And right after that, we'll be talking with Ron Sparks and Jon Hernandez. So stay with us. Thanks for tuning in. You've discovered *After Hours*, a continuing tradition here at KPFT 90.1 FM Houston.

Hi. And you are, of course, listening to *After Hours* here on KPFT 90.1 FM Houston. Our guest this evening is Ron Sparks and Jon Hernandez, who are in the process of organizing-- creating an organization called SMYAL Houston-- S-M-Y-A-L. Tell us a little bit about it. How did we get to where we are today, and where are we going?

- SMYAL is the abbreviation for Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League and, of course, of the Houston here. We've had several young adults come to us at different organizations saying, hey, we'd like to have a group to be involved in the community, but also be our own group. And through Jon's help, who is part of our organization in D.C., while he's in Houston here, has tried to get the organization going. And we've been having some preliminary meetings with different young people in the community, young adults in the community, and getting ideas. And hopefully. Right after the first of the year, we'll be kicking the organization off.

- Well, that sounds good. So what do you foresee the organization being?

- The organization will be an organization by young adults from 16 to 22. It's be operated by themselves. Of course, there will be facilitators, adult facilitators there to have input, to offer advice when asked. Also there will be professionals there to provide information as far as for support groups, professional counseling, and also for peer counseling groups, also be public speaking speakers, education, different type of social activities, social events for the young adults.

- That sounds like fun. So, Jon, you're from Washington, huh?

- Yeah. We're from Washington.

- How does the Houston community compare to the Washington community from what you've seen?

- [CHUCKLES] Youth-wise? [LAUGHS]

- Well, in general, youth-wise, yeah.

- Yeah, well, they're more outgoing out here in Houston, definitely a lot better.

- Really?

- Yeah, more outgoing.

- So it ought to be even easier to start a group then, right?

- Yeah, it's be great.

- Well, that sounds good. So, tell me a little bit about SMYAL in Washington.

- SMYAL in Washington is a youth outreach program. And it deals mainly with lesbian, gay, and bisexual, and friends of the sexual minority group. And what we do is reach out and have a meeting that is met once a week on Saturdays. And it's from 12:00 to 3:00. And we meet at Connecticut Avenue, which is near Dupont Circle, if anybody knows about--

- Yeah, OK.

- --DC

- Right in the middle of the ghetto.

- The heart of the [INAUDIBLE], there you go. And what we do is come out-- people who-- young people who want to come out and talk to us about their problems, anything like that. And we usually have coordinated topics on certain subjects, maybe on safer sex workshops or anything else. So we definitely get out and reach out to young people.

- So maybe if someone was just trying to come out or thinking-- you know, trying to even decide if they were gay or lesbian or whatever, then-- you know.

- They could come to the meetings and feel free and feel that their--

- Identity is confidential and all that stuff.

- --identity-- yeah, right. And there's a feeling of being comfortable there. And that's the important part because I remember when I came out, I just was just scared half to death. I was anxious, didn't know what to expect.

- Right. Yeah, it was real different.

- Yeah, totally.

- The organizing group of people that has been coming together and putting ideas together and reaching out and talking to people have been meeting over at Metropolitan Community Church of the Resurrection. Right now, we don't have a permanent meeting site set up and everything. There is a foundation here in Houston that is very open-minded and will be voting in January to make SMYAL a project of that foundation. And so it looks like they will go ahead and approve that. But once that's done, then there will be a funding source and also a lot more support as far as getting out into the community.

Some of the things that SMYAL Houston wants to do, not only is to provide a social outlet for the young adults, but also to be able to educate the public, go into the public schools, into school newspapers, run ads about SMYAL, let them know what's going on so that gay teens can know who they can turn to. I also work with counselors, school teachers, in ways to provide education to them so they know what to look for and how to work with the gay teens who are having problems with identity.

- Well, that sounds good, just kind of give people the clues to kind of look for. I wish I'd had that when I was growing up.

- Me too. Me too. I was growing up in Arkansas, and I was trying to say, I'm the only one in the Ozark Mountains?

- Well, I knew I wasn't one of "those" people when I was growing up. Yeah, I mean, there wasn't any way I was one of "those" people. You know, I was just-- I was the school prissy--

- Different.

- --and different.

- Yeah.

- You know, when recess came, and I jumped rope with the girls in the-- you know, and had a wonderful time. But, you know, the boys didn't do that. So, you know, I can definitely see where having a group like that could have been very beneficial. And sometimes I think, well, what would have happened if I'd come out when I was 15 and started looking at other guys?

So is the group organized at all then right now, or are you just still trying to get started? Just--

- Oh, we're still trying to get started. We've had several meetings prior to the holidays. We've had as many as 12 young adults and facilitators meet. We are looking for volunteers, facilitators who are paraprofessionals, professionals, and people that want to get involved in working with gay, lesbian, bisexual youth. There will be training sessions for those adult leaders.

And then also, we are, of course, looking for people who are interested in getting involved and just calling us and getting more information. We do have a phone number. And if anybody wants to call and just leave a number, we will be calling them back very discreetly. That number is 523-7242. So they can give that number a call, and an answering machine will answer, and we will call them back as soon as we can.

- That sounds good. And let's see. Tell us something else fun about the group. I mean, you've-- 12 to 16? So for--

- 16 to 22.

- 16 to 22. But so far you've had about 12 to 16 people show up at meetings and that kind of stuff.

- Some of the activities that the youth, young adults, want to do is do different type of social activities together, maybe have a prom night, and alternative prom night, where they may not feel comfortable going to Lamar High School with their male date or female date, but have a prom night. Go to Astroworld or other activities as a group and have more fun that way, rather than just having friends, but have people that have like causes and like understandings going out together, just like we used to have a couple of years ago, the Gay Day at Astroworld, but have a group of people like that.

Have speakers come in, not only for safe sex, but also for alcohol and drug abuse, shame reduction, enthusiasm, things like this. There are some good groups here in Houston that can come and provide a short seminar to the youth along their interest, things like that.

- And there has been for a while, sort of on again off again, an organization called HATCH, which was the Houston Area Teen Coalition--

- Of Homosexuals.

- Of Homosexuals. And I know HATCH is in the process of getting started again. How is your group similar, and how will you be serving the community, I guess, a different way maybe than HATCH is?

- Well, we immediately contacted HATCH just after we started thinking about it and spoke with their facilitator. And Jay has met with us, and we're going to be doing some things. They've invited us over to their New Year's Eve party. And some of the members of our organization, SMYAL, will be going over to the New Year's Eve party and meeting and working together.

We're not competing groups. Each person can belong to both organizations if they want to, just like you and I can belong to two different organizations doing the same projects here in Houston. I mean, there's nothing combating. It's just that our organization is one that I feel that we have enough-- we have a lot more support from people in the community that probably can provide a lot more outing activities and events and things. And we can reach out more because the organization we're working with has a lot more-- I don't want to say clout, but a lot more ability to provide information out into the community and let people know.

And we'll be working together hand in hand because, as the percentage goes, 10% of the population of Houston is gay. You can imagine how many gay teens are out there, gay and lesbian teens and bisexual teens. And people are needing to be reached out and touched and let them know that, hey, they're not the only one.

- That's right. So, Jon, obviously you're from Washington, and I'm sure Washington's a little different than Houston.

- Oh, yeah.

- I can't imagine that. The weather is similar, I know.

- [LAUGHS]

- But what would you say are some of the main needs of the--

- Teenagers.

- --teenagers, yeah.

- OK. I think it's a real need to have a group because we're very fortunate to even have a group, even start one, because when I first came out, it was kind of hard. Where do I go? Where do I go to? What can I do?

- How old were you when you first came out?

- Oh, this was recently, so about a year ago. So I'm fairly new. And but throughout the year, I've learned a lot and I've coped a lot. And this is a very scary thing when you first come out and you come out to your parents and so forth. And you just don't know where to go because there's nowhere else to go.

- It must be something to just have been out for a year and you're already out there organizing other groups in other cities.

- Yeah, I want to help get it going.

- That's good. Yeah.

- We also want to act as a-- add to what Ron was talking about interacting with other groups. We also want to get into other organizations, like PFLAG and so forth. And we also want to help also in some studies with teen crisis, as far as rape, abuse, even prevention of suicide. And we're trying to get that going and really reach out to a lot of people.

- OK. Do you find that most of the people your age are real educated on AIDS and how they get it and how it's transmitted? Or is it-

- I know in-- I can't imagine. I guess, being that age, as hard as it was for me to deal with my own sexuality, trying to deal with a disease like AIDS must be phenomenal. I mean, I know it's phenomenal to me now, and that's something I've been dealing with for a long time.

- I think the young crowd is somewhat educated. There was a study in San Francisco, or in California, that half of the people that were taught or have listened to anything on education on AIDS or same sex don't even apply the safe sex guides. And that's a very unfortunate thing. And I think that the young crowd needs to realize that this is a real serious thing that, until we have come up with a cure for AIDS, that safe sex is the only way to go. And we need to keep on doing it until they realize that it's important.

- Well, I know a lot of times in the straight community, the perception is, well, I'm not gay, and I'm not sleeping with anybody that's gay. So I don't need to worry about it. But you know it's-- do you think most of the gay teens are really paying attention, or is that something that, say, SMYAL kind of focuses on from time to time to say, hey, make sure, you know, you're really--

- Well, we don't want to overpressure or overdo it on just safer sex. We also want to get into other activities. But we also, from time to time, we want to emphasize on safe sex. So I think it's very important. And we do need-- I think the young crowd does really need to wake up [CHUCKLES] sometimes.

- Well, I think everybody needs to wake up.

- Yeah, everybody. Yeah.

- So, Mr. Sparks, are you like the facilitator for this new group:

- I'm one of two facilitators at this time. There's another facilitator that is working with the group. And we've had several other people that have come to us and say they're interested in helping. But Dave and I began when Jon came to us and some other young adults who are going to Metropolitan Community Church and came to us and said, hey, we're interested in starting a group. And so that's how it started. And it started way before we even met Jon.

And Jon just so happened to show up on the doorstep at church, more or less, and started attending while he was here in Houston. And he started talking about this great group in D.C. And so we just kind of started putting our heads together and talking about six weeks ago, about two months ago, and started putting ideas together and talking to people and took the proposal to a foundation here in Houston. And the foundation has really accepted it. And they've officially going to vote on at their board meeting in January, to accept the organization as a program of the foundation.

- Well, good.

- And so we're going from there. Some of the things that some of the group has brought up they wanted to do is to work with the teen crisis line here and also maybe provide a hotline of some type, similar to information that they can provide for gay teens because teen-- gay young adults and gay teens can relate better to themselves, if they have someone they can talk to, if there's a crisis line they can talk to. Also, some of the people have indicated they wanted some type of drop-in center, where they can just come in after school and be with people their own age and visit with people and stuff like that and everything. So those are some things that are kind of future events that, once the organization gets going, they're looking at possibly trying to find funding for to set up here in the Houston community.

- OK. Our guests this evening are Ron Sparks and Jon Hernandez with the SMYAL organization-- Jon from Washington, D.C and Ron here locally in Houston. We'll be back in just a few minutes. We're going to take a short music break and listen to some more Romanovsky and Phillips. We had a request for "Lost Emotions."

You're listening to KPFT 90.1 FM, *After Hours*, a continuing tradition here at KPFT. And our guests this evening are Ron Sparks and Jon Hernandez with a group called SMYAL. And so Ron, tell us a little more about-- I mean, I know some of the documentation you came in was from Out Youth Austin.

- Correct. We've been in contact with not only SMYAL in D.C, but Out Youth Austin, also with the National Gay Alliance for Young Adults in Dallas, where the national headquarters is. We've been going out and gathering information so we can have the best of all of it. The group in Austin is really going. They've been going a little over a year. And they're working real closely with their executive director in getting information for training manuals and for adults-- for the adult facilitators and things like that.

Some of the things that the SMYAL group also will be doing is not only advocacy and education, but also outreach programs and then just direct services to the youth and everything. Someone had called in a while ago and was wanting to know how we would protect the youth from advances from other people and things like this. The volunteers will be thoroughly screened. And some of the guidelines that will facilitate for volunteers to work with the young adults is that there will be no activities at all outside the group meeting. The only contact an adult will have with the youth is during officially sanctioned type meetings.

And if there is anything that does take place as far as-- if friendship, things like that outside the meeting, then both-- the adult will be asked to not be participating in the group anymore because of the fact that everything that goes on in the meeting is confidential, and it's to protect the young adult and being feel that they have a safe haven place to go to and be with people their own age.

- OK. Well, that sounds neat. And I guess if the contact phone number for Houston is 523-7242. And I guess that would be for anyone interested in being in the group, whether they're youth or whether they would be an adult wishing to work with the group, right?

- Correct. And that is a 24-hour phone number. There is an answering machine. And so they can just give it a call. And Jon and I or some of the other volunteers will return the phone call as quickly as we can.

- That sounds good. So, Jon, so you were in Houston visiting and just got caught all up in this.

- Yeah, I just got all wrapped up.

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah, I just came here. And I decided, well, jeez. You know, young people need a place to go, a safe environment, a safe alternative to the bars--

- That's true.

- --that they can't get in.

- A 16-year-old can't get in the bars.

- That's right. And this is a place where they can go and be themselves and have and enjoy themselves as well, having activities and so forth.

- So how long are you in town for?

- I'm here until the beginning of January.

- Oh, OK. Until school starts and--

- Yeah, and I've got to go back.

- Yeah. Well, that's good. So what else?

- Well, we're just wanting to hear from people. Once we start the advertising and everything, hopefully more people will be contacting us as far as information about SMYAL and how to get involved and things like that. But we need people to get involved now. We want their input into ideas of what they want, how they want the group going and things like this.

We have some ideas as far as from different groups, like the Out Youth Austin. Their groups are broken not only according to gender, but also according to age. And so we want input so we make sure that we reach the most people and help the most people that we can through the services that we are able to provide.

- OK. Again, our guests this evening have been Ron Sparks and Jon Hernandez with a group they're forming in Houston called SMYAL. Jon's with a group in Washington. And it's been nice having you here on the show. And we may take a few phone calls in a little while, if you want to stick around. And we'll see how things go and see what kind of responses we get.

- OK. Thank you.

- I gave the phone number a little earlier, and I gave it wrong. It seems the regular number has been forwarded to voicemail. So if you'd like to call us, call 526-5738. And we'll try to take a few phone calls after this next record.

You're listening to KPFT and *After Hours*. That was a Erasure from their *Chorus* album, singing "Chorus." And our guests this evening are Ron Sparks and Jon Hernandez with the youth group SMYAL, which is--

- Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League of Houston.

- OK. So give us a call if you'd like to ask them a couple questions on the air. We'll take a few phone calls-- 526-5738, 526-KPFT. And we're going to listen to a little more music. And give us a call if you'd like to get on the air. We'd like to hear from you.