Soulforce
Annual Report 2013

Investing in Ideas
Executive Summary

We can only go to the most conservative areas of the country for so long (15 years!) before we directly grapple with the truth that anti-LGBTQ beliefs are functionally and philosophically intertwined with a whole range of regressive beliefs.

The kind of Biblical literalism that buttresses anti-LGBTQ worldviews has its own specific history, right? The desire to regulate gender, sexuality, and bodies is tied to a movement in this country to regulate other things, like how we form families, how or if we work, how we organize community, how we access education, and how we relate to land and capital.

We closed 2012 with a deep intuition and calling to explore our role as an LGBTQ organization in a social justice context that makes these intricate connections. As we celebrate 15 years, we reflect on what we have learned and invest that in our analysis that carries us forward.

Taking those lessons about the intricated knitted state of identity and discrimination, we are beginning to embody all of that thinking with practical actions – sometimes through grand new programs, but more often through subtle shifts in naming why we do what we do and the spirit in which we pursue it.

For example, our international work addresses the negative influence of U.S. fundamentalists abroad. Our work comes from a specific perspective on solidarity vs. charity learned from our own history. The desire to help the situation “over there” is not what moves us, although we are indeed stung by injustice anywhere.

Instead, Soulforce has come to understand the way that matters of race and class pass through issues of sex and gender, especially in how religion speaks to and complicates both. So our participation in international efforts comes from a place of taking responsibility for how we are implicated both as people who live in the Global North and as people who are connected to a global LGBTQ and allied community.

The elements that we challenge in our domestic work – the power centers, the educational platform, the thought leaders – have tentacles that reach beyond our borders. So this year, our task has been to understand how power, privilege, and oppression make LGBTQ activism a layered and complex endeavor, and then use that knowledge to effectively address the source of oppression here at home and participate responsibly abroad.

From Haven Herrin, Acting Executive Director
The Soulforce Glossary

This is a journey, and we’re going to need some paddles. Below are the terms we throw around with glee, but also with careful months of thought about how to articulate our reason for being, our expertise, and our place in the movement. We invite you to invest in these Big Ideas with us.

Intersectional Justice

When Soulforce speaks of “layered and complex” activism, this is the framework we are referring to. We recognize that different identities interact to produce different life experiences. In the same vein, different forms of oppression interact to catalyze each other. For example, to be a young undocumented immigrant from Vietnam who identifies as a bisexual man is a very different experience than being a black lesbian elder living in a rural town.

To engage in intersectional justice is, first, to be sensitive to these differences and the political and social histories that produce them. The second level is to make responsive choices about language, leadership, geography, agenda, and organizing practices to reflect the real complexity and diversity of the LGBTQ community.

Stigma

We do a lot of roots-based thinking, as in, “What, at the most elemental level, is oppression?” Systems or acts of oppression produce stigma. Stigma is setting someone apart, making them less, putting them “outside the circle” of acceptance or affirmation. In many religious communities and cultures, to stigmatize someone is to toss them into the categories of immoral, unholy, or sinful.

Fundamentalism

If you take one idea away from this list, please make it this one. The next roots-y question is, “What makes someone perpetrate stigma against another?” A journalist asked us not long ago, regarding our school centered work, if all the conservative schools we visit decided to let all the gay folks in tomorrow, would it mean that Evangelical Christianity had changed.

Our resounding answer was No, it wouldn’t. It would mean that they had decided to let LGBTQ students participate in a broken system.

This was a watershed moment for us. We are an organization founded in the principles of going to the source of oppression to uproot it from foundation. In some of our most important work we do, this year we learned to ask the next Big Question: “What ideology is at the root of these schools that makes them, over and over again, choose to stigmatize all kinds of folks, including LGBTQ people?” Our answer is fundamentalism.

Here is our definition:

Fundamentalism is the ideology that insists that unequal access to resources and self-sovereignty is inherent, inevitable, necessary, and righteous.

This explains why we find many forms of oppression repeated in similar patterns from location to location, and it illuminates how anti-LGBTQ practices and beliefs are bound up in other kinds of discrimination.
Let’s play a game called...

Same Song, More Bass

Now celebrating 15 years, we can articulate the full impact and potential of our work. The image of leavened bread is on our minds as we view our timeline and welcome in new eras of projects and activists. We serve as a catalyst when we do our best work, and we pass on the lessons.

How our roots find new shoots...

Then: Addressing the political and social stigma spewing directly from religious, and particularly Christian, leaders

We Learned: Why do we focus on sectors of Christianity? Because it’s about who has consolidated financial and social power in this country.

Now: We continue to address the religious people and institutions that spread hateful ideology, but we have also come to recognize that there’s “Christianity, The Religion” and then there’s the “Christianized Power Structures.” Religion has formed into shorthand for belonging, civilization, and order that political forces use as a weapon.

Then: Bearing witness to and intervening at denominational gatherings where anti-LGBTQ rules were up for voting

We learned: First, we helped strong LGBTQ groups blossom within denominations. Second, we started to ask why, within any religion, some factions go left and some go right.

Now: We note that fundamentalism as an ideology is distinct from religion and shows up as many kinds of oppression and loves to use religion as its tool and shield. This concept positions us to be more relevant across faith systems with greater potential for building alliances across movements.

Then: Challenging the anti-LGBTQ policy and polity at the schools of the Religious Right on the Equality Ride.

We learned: More than any other entity – legal aid, think tanks, political leaders – the foundations of the Religious Right fund education and scholarships. Not only at Christian schools but also secular campuses.

Now: We couple what we know about the Religious Right infrastructure with our analysis of fundamentalism. We organize with diverse students to produce the next generation of Equality Ride work that engages fundamentalism through multiple channels, such as race and gender, so that we get past the surface symptoms to confront the larger core ideology.
Programming Report

In 2013 focused on carefully embodying what we know about fundamentalism and what we mean by intersectional justice. We are thoughtful about connecting our work at home with how we participate in international projects.

Equality Ride

The heart of the Equality Ride – confronting fundamentalism to end stigma and empowering activists, particularly youth, to be agents of change – remains the same.

While we worked to integrate the Equality Ride this year with our other core programs, we worked with students on a one-by-one basis. Here are just some of the places we have connected with student activists in the last year:

McMurry University
An opera student at McMurry on scholarship was removed from the music program because of her “lesbian lifestyle.” Through our work, McMurry University Interim President has agreed to fund off-campus voice lessons for the student and tap our Executive Director to provide SafeZone training to staff.

Biola University
In spring, Biola’s “underground queer group” went public with an online collection of stories and direct action. The top-rated Biola professor compared having an LGBTQ group on campus to hosting a racist group. Soulforce partnered with the student group to launch a media counter-campaign through Huffington Post, local newspapers, and social media.

Azusa Pacific University
A professor at APU was recently fired for being transgender, and we are working with him to publicize his story, petition the administration, and support student leaders – 20 of whom just came out as an act protest.

Connecting Students and Alumni
Two firsts: A conference for LGBTQ students at religiously fundamentalist schools. We organize Safety Net's (a coalition of LGBTQ alumni of these schools we played a key role in founding) first public project in Portland, OR in April. We brought together a delegation of alumni and staff to attend the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities conference on diversity. The CCCU is the umbrella body of most Equality Ride schools. We also met Warner Pacific College's nascent student group in the process to offer wisdom from first-hand experience.

IMPACT
1. Direct support for 7 LGBTQ student groups on Equality Ride campuses
2. A coalition of LGBTQ alumni groups with 120 participants
3. 135 attendees to Soulforce programming focused on campus change
4. 14 campus policy changes since 2005, including banning ex-gay therapy and adding sexual orientation to non-discrimination policies
Delegate Program: 2012-2013 Session

In this program we give activists training, mentoring, and resources to implement projects within guided parameters and a Soulforce perspective. The 2012-13 session concluded in June with Delegates from Miami, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Seattle.

Sample of Events On the Ground

- LGBTQ homecoming for Ohio University students
- Statewide training for LGBTQ students and educators
- Provided education at God Loves Uganda film screening
- Trans* & Faith Symposium for clergy
- Alternative Thanksgiving to document LGBTQ immigration stories
- 8 days of an “activist pop-up shop” to explore fundamentalism, faith, and migration stories
- A dialogue with 50 multi-racial activists on the impact of faith on LGBTQ organizing
- The first-ever conference for LGBTQ students of religiously conservative schools
- A workshop on the intersection of LGBTQ identity and being an undocumented student

IMPACT

1. 8 well-trained and diverse activists who are now Soulforce ambassadors around the world
2. 1,032 clergy, educators, students, and individuals educated through events and mailings
3. News feature on the BBC
4. Activated 30 faith-based organizers to participate in state-wide legislative campaigns in Ohio

I feel so much more involved in Soulforce now and so much more equipped and confident to step into my role as an activist after completing the Delegate Program.

- Delegate Ellie Ash-Bala

Delegate Program: 2013-2014 Session

This session focused on Ohio where we have a strong crew of volunteers and donors and the culture is at a full boil with prominent LGBTQ legislation being debated. Three Delegates and one Advisor work to incorporate immigration justice, arts-based activism, theology, and LGBTQ issues into fun, public events.

“A 19-year-old student came up to me and said, ‘I have a story to tell.’ He took a sheet of paper and drew a color-pencil rendition of the inside of the front of a church, with an altar. Behind the altar was a blond, robed male figure with his arms raised, and hands held upwards. On either side of the robed figure was a couple. In front of the altar were 2 crouched male figures. Underneath the drawing the young artist wrote, ‘He didn’t like the sons he had, so he got 2 more.’

- From Delegate Paul Ricketts’ Pop-Up Shop at the Global Gallery in Columbus, Ohio

Delegate Paul Ricketts
**In the Public Arena**

Throughout the year, we have many opportunities to speak from a place of soulful activism into mainstream society events and media spaces.

- Led the DOMA rally at the Supreme Court in prayer and providing moral witness to stand against Westboro Baptist Church
- Attended the White House Easter Breakfast and joined the growing presence of progressive faith narratives in the President’s work.
- Working with the State Department on religious exemptions and how to support local pastors in places where U.S. fundamentalism holds sway
- Played a key role in a multi-year campaign that culminated in the closing Exodus International in 2013, the market leader in “ex-gay” therapy

**In Words**

We keep a constant eye on the news of the day, updating our members via our own blog and the Huffington Post. A selection of our most read:

- **Covered in our blog:**
  - Uganda and the United Nations
  - Professional sports figures coming out
  - Remembering CeCe Acoff during Transgender Awareness Week

- **HuffPost Gay Voices**
  - Rev. Dr. Cindi Love, Executive Director, Soulforce
  - *Apologies Are Too Late When the Damage Is Already Done*
  - *An Eagle Scout Turns In His Badge*
**Symposium Series**

A Symposium is a multi-day educational event that takes place at welcoming schools and institutions. We use Symposia for building organizational partnerships, recruiting campaign applicants, and building our base.

In **March** we hosted a Symposium at the University of Richmond. We touched on two main themes: intersectional justice and sexuality/spirituality. While not an anti-LGBTQ school, many students there are still in the closet because of family and religion.

Our second Symposium took place in **April** in collaboration with Inclusive Justice in Ypsilanti, Michigan. We addressed the practice of nonviolence and the use of visual tools and social media in our on-the-ground activism, talking through case scenarios that apply to real events coming up in Michigan.

Our final Symposium of the year was held in **December** in Sacramento, California, where we partnered with the Faithfull Fools in an ongoing collaboration to bring issues of economic justice, inclusion, sexuality and gender to the fore.

**IMPACT**

1. 185 attendees to Soulforce led programs
2. Established ourselves as paid providers of college programming as new earned income
3. Non-confrontational relationship building with Equality Ride schools
4. Built relationships with organizers and clergy who will be partners in our ongoing Methodist work
INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

To be part of international – and by that we don’t mean “work somewhere else” but rather work that implicates and partners with U.S. activists – is to look at LGBTQ work in a context that inherently draws race, colonialism, HIV/AIDS, and economic justice into the frame.

Soulforce comes into this work for two reasons. First, understanding the levers of mass media – both for how we share our message and how U.S. Fundamentalists wield this tool – has been a mainstay of our theory of change and campaigns over the years. We call this stream of work Influencing Broadcasters, and it is vital because the communications network once built to evangelize the Global South is now a massive media empire being used to preach hate.

The second track we call Amplify the Voices. We are working through partnerships with the United Nations Compass Coalition, the HRC Faith and Religion Council, the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), and the Global Interfaith Network to support LGBTQ voices of faith who can speak to both religious reform and human rights.

Soulforce was founded to address the political and religious oppression of LGBTQ people; the work to neutralize U.S. fundamentalism’s exportation of rhetoric, funds, influence, and model legislation sits right at the crossroads of our commitments to faith-focused work, intersectional justice, and the smart use of

The Breadth of Our Connections:

• Providing guidance to the U.S. State Department on how to intervene against U.S. Fundamentalists’ meddling in other nations’ governance

• Working with the Compass Coalition to provide liturgical guidance and other materials for an alternative blueprint to preaching about sexuality and gender in the Global South where U.S. Fundamentalists have influence

• Enabling the presences of dozens of LGBTQ activists from the Global South to participate in the 25th World AIDS Conference and connecting the dots between religious bigotry and the retrenchment of HIV/AIDS

• Providing consultation to Amnesty International’s Country and Thematic Specialty Team for LGBT Issues

• Chair of the Steering Committee for the Global Interfaith Network, the first international coalition of LGBTQ activists working the field of faith to make the case for human rights from religious conviction

Global Interfaith Steering Committee at the Conference Planning Session in Johannesburg, South Africa, July 2013.
2013 Financial Summary

Total Income: $377,398
Total Expenses: $355,667
Salaries: $192,935
Programs: $171,747

Many thanks to our Supporting Foundations

The H. van Ameringen Foundation
The Collingwood Foundation
The Danielson Foundation
The Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund
The Heller-Bernard Fund
The Small Change Foundation

And to our many dedication individual supporters who comprise 48% of our annual giving this year!

Soulforce is a tax-exempt 501(c)3 non-profit. In our commitment to transparency, we make available our IRS Form 990 upon request. In addition, we participate in the Movement Advancement Project which vets and codifies our accounting each year and reconciles our finances with our public service, also available to the public.