

Kendra Cross, junior, (front row, blue shirt) marches in the Growing American Youth's Pride Parade June 24. More than 500 teenagers from the St. Louis area showed up in support for LGBT rights. "It was beautiful, ear piercingly loud, unbearably hot, but so moving. So many people were there to support, and [it] was just such a loving atmosphere," Kendra said. *photo courtesy of Growing Youth America*



Born This Way

"It's like being in the wrong body. [If you were a girl], imagine you had a boy's body and you were put in boy's clothes, you'd obviously feel more feminine, and you'd want to change," Darby Hall, sophomore, said.

During Darby's time at KHS, he began to make the transition from female to male. There was only so much he could do, as \$9,000 top surgery was too expensive. Despite this, Darby still found ways to get the transition started.

"I'm hoping sometime next year I can start testosterone," Darby said. "From eighth grade to freshman year, I started dressing differently. I started chest binding and cutting my hair. It was so much more comfortable. I felt so much better about myself."

Even without surgery or hormone therapy, Darby was able to pass as a male in public, using male bathrooms by dressing like a guy, getting his hair cut and wearing chest binders, undergarments that flatten a one's chest.

"That makes me feel so much better, that I can pass as a guy in public," Darby said. "But for me, I know my body is still there, and it

makes me uncomfortable. It's like people who have body dysmorphic disorder, who look in the mirror and see something totally different [and] are so uncomfortable with that."

Darby's family was a big factor while he was learning to be more comfortable with himself.

"My mom is really supportive. She tries really hard to understand it. She's totally okay with it. She let me know that early," Darby said. "She tries really, really hard, and it makes me so happy. She's really helpful because she's there. She'll go out of her way to help me."

While Darby's mom, Athena Hall, was supportive, she was also scared due to the negative attention LGBTQ teenagers drew.

"It can be dangerous being LGBTQ, and it's scary to think your kid may get hurt. The threat of violence never really goes away," Athena Hall said. "I know he's going through a very difficult time and needs all the support he could get. He's still my child. Once you love your child, that doesn't ever change."

Darby said the Kirkwood community was not as accepting as they seemed at first glance.

"Kirkwood [seems like], 'We're this great group of happy smiling people!' It seems that way, but once you get in the middle of it and have to deal with people when you're going through this, it's not as accepting as it seems," Darby said.

"I think people like to act a lot more accepting than they are. [But] how can you support something, then when it happens you, deny that it's [not worth supporting]?"

Things like intentionally using female pronouns, or worse, 'it', combined with lack of support from his peers, discouraged Darby from making the transition during his time at high school.

"There's been a lot of times where I've [thought I] should stop transitioning, maybe I can just toughen up and suck it up and deal with [transitioning]. It's gotten to the point where I've realized I'm not going to put myself through that just because a few people might not like it," Darby said. "I feel like people use [labels] when it's unnecessary. Why can't I just be a person? As opposed to being a person, I'm fifteen different labels pushed together."

Junior Leads Church Sexual Awareness Group

TALKING ABOUT SEX AT SCHOOL was taboo. Kendra Cross, junior, wanted to break down that barrier. That is why she got involved in Our Whole Lives (OWL), a program at her church, Eliot Chapel, devoted to teaching sex education over all aspects of sexuality more in-depth than at KHS. OWL, taught by a board consisting of a gay man, lesbian, a bisexual person, and a transgender person covered things about LGBTQ sex education that high school health classes didn't. Kendra saw an obligation within OWL to not only educate high schoolers, but middle schoolers as well.

"There's a reason we are how we are. There's a reason we have the capacity to do what we do."

- Kendra Cross, junior

"When the middle schoolers walk in, you say 'sex' and they giggle. Sex is a part of our whole lives. It's a huge part of relationships. It's not something that should be shut behind closed doors," Kendra said. "I think OWL is important because, at the beginning, girls sit on one side and boys sit on the other and when sex is mentioned everyone laughs. By the end of the program, boys and girls are totally integrated. It's not something that's a taboo anymore, and it's not something that's a big scary subject. People can start to talk about it and that's really healthy."

Due to programs like OWL and

GSA, Kendra felt KHS was open and accepting.

"Kirkwood is very lucky because if I was who I am somewhere else and I was out, I would be ridiculed for being who I am," Kendra said. "[My previous girlfriend and I] went to prom together last year, and that was fine. We went together, danced together, stood in the middle of the floor and kissed and it was completely fine. At my friend's school, she couldn't even buy a ticket for another girl for a dance."

While KHS and Eliot Chapel were accepting, other environments and churches were not, according to Kendra. Many who disapproved of

LGBTQ rights argued that marriage was supposed to be a sanctity between a man and a woman for the purpose of having kids.

"The whole argument that marriage is meant for reproduction is ridiculous. What about the straight couples who can't have kids? Is their love less important? Should they not be allowed to get married?" Kendra said. "That's not even an argument. We're not animals. There's a reason we are how we are. There's a reason we have the capacity to do what we do. It's stupid to limit that."

story by Claire Hubert design by Emily Riggs photos by Sophie Lanzendorf and Jenna Rose



Out and Proud

In a world where horror stories of coming out were commonplace in media, Brendan Bailey, sophomore, got lucky. When Brendan came out in the seventh grade, he received support from his grandma to his best friends. However, it was difficult for him to tell his parents.

"I waited four months after coming out to my friends and to my school. I emailed my mom telling her I might like guys," Brendan said. "The first thing my mom said was that she'll love me no matter what. It didn't matter if I was gay, straight, bi, whatever. That made it less scary to come out to them. I loved cheerleading and Britney Spears and the Spice Girls. I was very, very gay, and they all knew, so it wasn't that big of a change for them. They

just worried a lot about me getting bullied."

However, Brendan's parents had nothing to worry about. Teens at other schools did not get the same support he did at Kirkwood, according to Brendan.

"My friends get bullied at other schools. [One of my friends] has a restraining order against people [at his school] because they are so [unaccepting] in their thinking and don't accept gay people," Brendan said. "I was scared going into high school because I didn't know what older people would be like or how my classmates had changed over the summer [from middle school to KHS]. Once I got here, it was not a big deal at all. Kirkwood's so open. Everyone knows I'm gay, and they

respect me."

While coming out was not hard for Brendan, teenagers from all over the country asked him for help after seeing him in weekly YouTube videos of Andrew Lowe, sophomore.

"Some people from other states will randomly [direct message] me [on Twitter], and I give them my number. There's an eighth grader that asks me for a lot of advice. He's in the same situation that I was in, and he texts me a lot asking how he should tell his friends," Brendan said. "People look up to me because it wasn't hard for me at all. I'm not struggling with it at all anymore. I learned to accept myself, and people have learned to accept me. I got lucky though, very lucky,

because I know a lot of people who go through hell and back when they come out."

Brendan wanted to take his positive experiences with coming out and use them to help others in the same situation.

"It's not fun to be in the closet. Having to hide who you are and not be yourself is hell. Even in the seventh grade, I was suffering anxiety and depression because I couldn't be who I wanted to be," Brendan said. "I just know it's not easy, and sometimes you need help. People need to accept themselves and love themselves. You're never really alone. There are so many people going through the same thing."

photos courtesy of Brendan Bailey

from the students

Gay Marriage

» "Gay marriage should be legal because if a man and woman love each other and can get married to prove their love, then I believe that there's nothing wrong with a same sex couple doing the exact same thing."
- Emily Wiltse, senior

"I don't really care. If it makes them happy, then why not? Every person should have the same rights."
- Joe O'Brien, junior

"I think it shouldn't be a marriage, it should be a civil union, it's more simple. That way they're still together and the government understands that they're together but it's not horrible to other people looking at it."
- Sean Miller, junior



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