Virginia Uribe Award for Creative Leadership in Human Rights
Changing One of the Last Bastions of Homophobia

◊ You Can Play ◊

You Can Play is a Denver-based non-profit whose goal is to eliminate homophobia in sports. Its message for LGBT youth is: “Don’t give up your love of sport or your desire to play because you’re afraid teammates won’t accept you. We’re working hard to change the culture of locker rooms and sports arenas...Heart, talent and commitment are what matter to athletes and fans–now let’s prove that you can play.”

You Can Play reaches out to athletes and asks them to affirm that gay teammates are accepted. Hundreds have responded. You Can Play has found that not only are athletes, coaches and fans willing to step up and publicly support LGBT athletes, colleges are willing to recruit them.

Two years ago, You Can Play released a video called “The Faceoff”. It features appearances from popular National Hockey League (NHL) players. Aired originally by NBC, the video has been uploaded to YouTube where it has been seen by hundreds of thousands of people. You Can Play has also formed a partnership with Major League Soccer (MLS).

The spark for You Can Play came after Brian Kitts, a member of GForce Sports, a team of gay hockey players, heard former pro hockey scout Patrick Burke speak at the University of Denver. They chatted and decided to create You Can Play, along with another GForce Sports member—Glenn Witman. Patrick Burke had recently lost his gay brother in a car accident. He saw You Can Play as a way of honoring his late brother Brendan, a devoted hockey player who came out as openly gay while serving as a student manager of the Miami University hockey team.

Our society is undergoing a historic cultural shift regarding the acceptance of gay people. You Can Play is spearheading that change in one of the last bastions of homophobia. “We want to make locker rooms safe for all athletes, rather than places of fear, slurs and bullying,” says Patrick Burke.