

How to Employ Critical Consciousness When Working with LGBTQ Youth

May Freck, Youth Empowerment Coordinator, she/her



Common Ground
Sanctuary
Royal Oak, MI

Meet the Presenter

May Freck, Youth Empowerment
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Our *perspective*:

“[T]he use of stories as a means to foster identification with the other is not enough; vicarious distress in hearing of another's suffering or trauma alone does not lead to justice—**action does.**” – from *Beyond Cultural Competence: Critical Consciousness, Social Justice, and Multicultural Education*, by Kumagai, Arno K. MD and Lypson, Monica L. MD



Common Ground *Programs*

The Sanctuary Basic Center

A Step Forward

Graduated Apartment Program

Mentoring Program

Youth Leadership Council

Objectives for this presentation

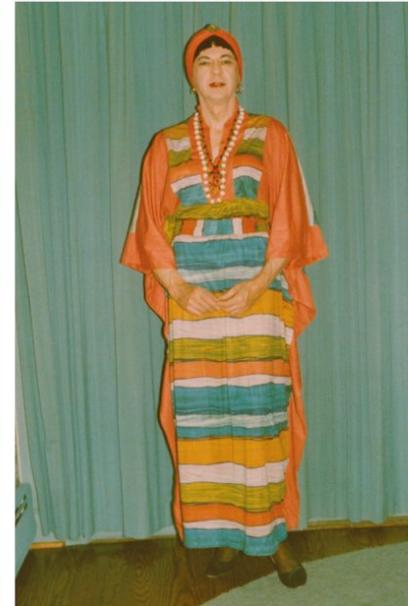
- » The participants will learn the importance of going beyond cultural competency and how to employ critical consciousness in personal and professional environments.
- » Participants will learn best practices for engaging with LGBTQ youth and the impacts of providing a supportive relationship, as well as a safe space.
- » Participants will be able to identify elements that they can implement within their RHY programs to improve experiences of LGBTQ youth.

The *Basics*

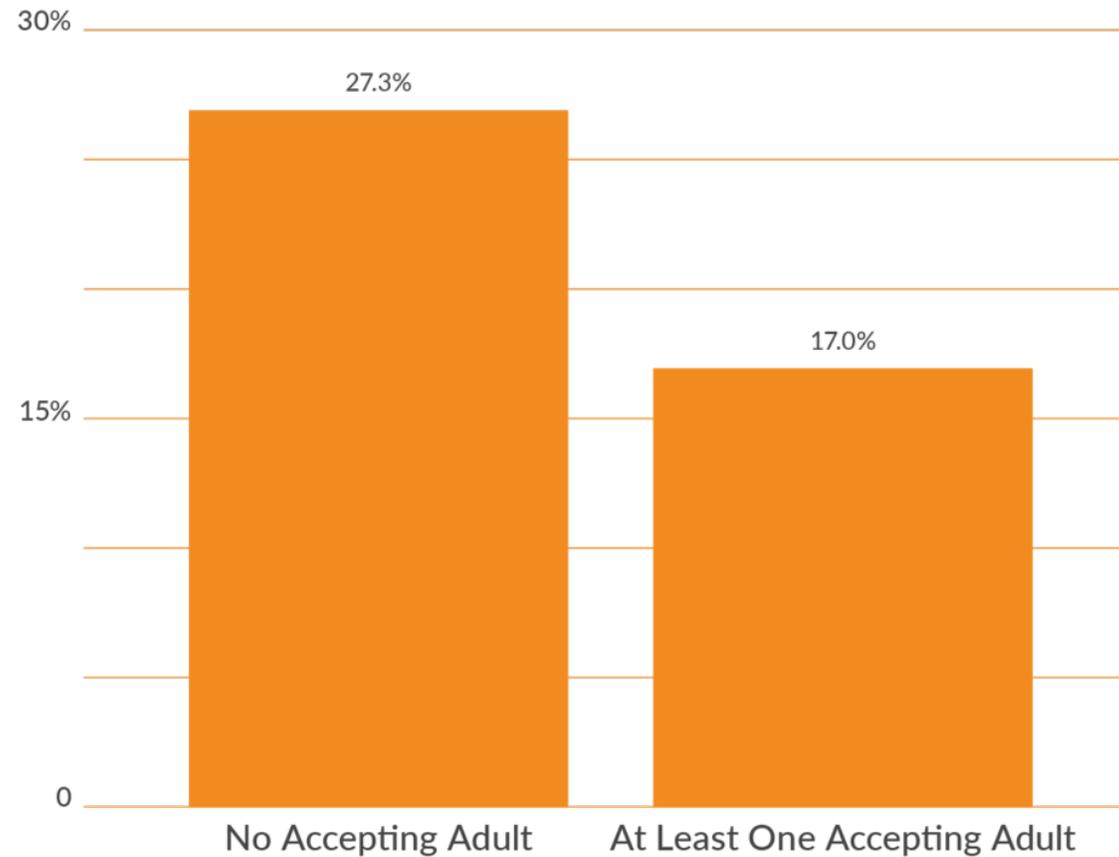
Lesbian
Gay
Bisexual
Transgender
Queer
Questioning
Intersex
Asexual

Non-Binary
Genderfluid
Pansexual
Cisgender
Heterosexual
Pronouns, such as
she/her, he/him,
and they/them.

Have a youth or someone in your life using a term you've never heard before? Simply ask, 'what does _____ mean to you?'



Suicide Attempt Rate Among Those with Accepting Adults



The Trevor Project's National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health shows a significant drop in suicide attempts when LGBTQ youth have even just *one* accepting adult in their life.

(The Trevor Project, 2019)

Cultural Competency & Critical Consciousness

If we accept that cultural competency is only the first step, what is the next one we should take?

According to the Newark Community Collaborative Board, critical consciousness “focuses on the role of oppression and privilege in creating and sustaining social and individual dysfunction. [...] From a critical consciousness perspective, dysfunction is perceived as a direct consequence of structural and internalized inequality.”

Our question: Why do
LGBTQ youth have
higher rates of
homelessness than
non-LGBTQ youth?



Let's work through it...

Why do people in general struggle with homelessness?

- » Living in poverty
 - » Lack of affordable housing
 - » Mental health issues, including substance use
- (The National Coalition for the Homeless, 2017)

How does society respond to LGBTQ youth?

- » Let's look at some maps that show what kind of protections there are there for LGBTQ people in America.
 - » There are no protections at the federal level for LGBTQ people aside from the right to be married
- (Human Rights Campaign, 2019)



Let's put those two things *together.*

When we connect the oppression LGBTQ people face in our country with the reasons why people tend to be homeless, we see the reasons why LGBTQ people are more likely to be homeless.



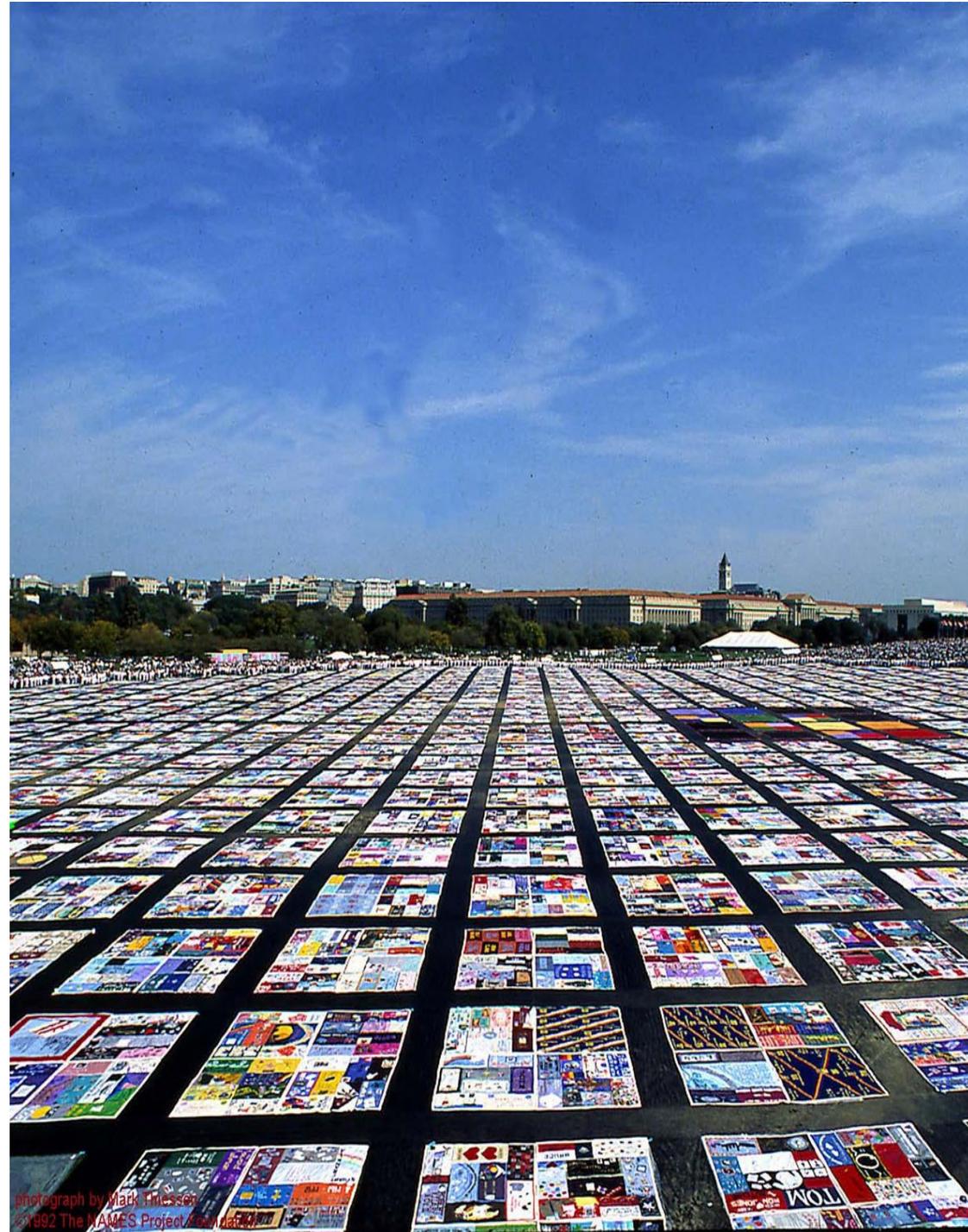


What can we *do* about it?

Anti-oppression thought *and* anti-oppressive action.

Anti-Oppressive Thought

- » We must acknowledge and question privilege, as well as take on internalized oppression.
- » Additionally, we need to apply this thought process to trends, data, and problems we face in our day-to-day work with RHY.
- » This step is necessary because in order for the actions we take to be meaningful, we must have genuine understanding of the reasons something is occurring.
- » If we take action without serious thought, we can end up taking an unhelpful or even harmful action in our quest to walk alongside others on their journey.



Photograph by Mark Thiessen
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Figure 2.18 Supportive School Staff and Feelings of Safety and Missing School

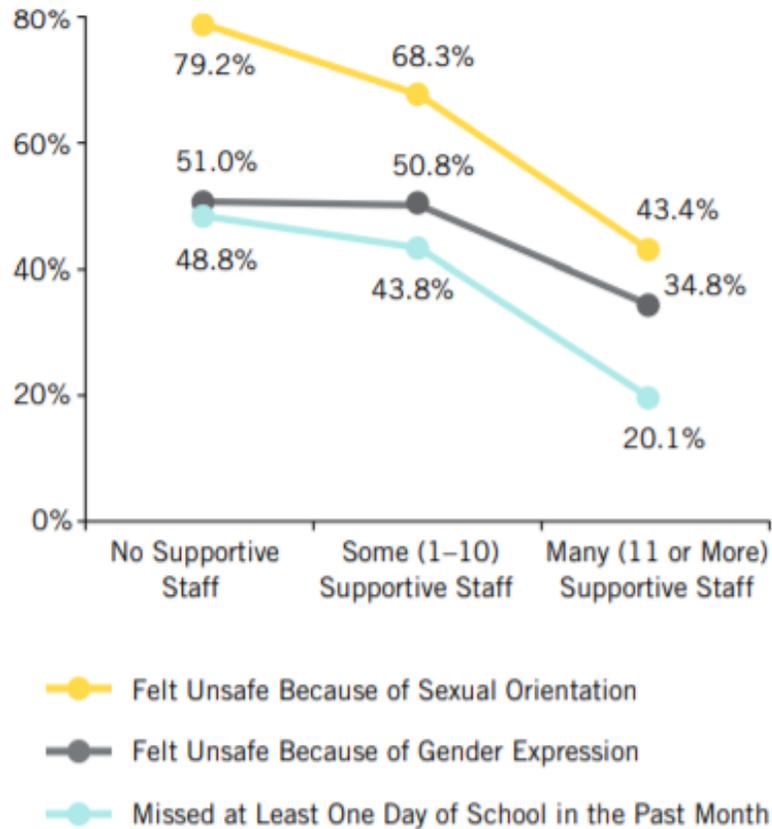
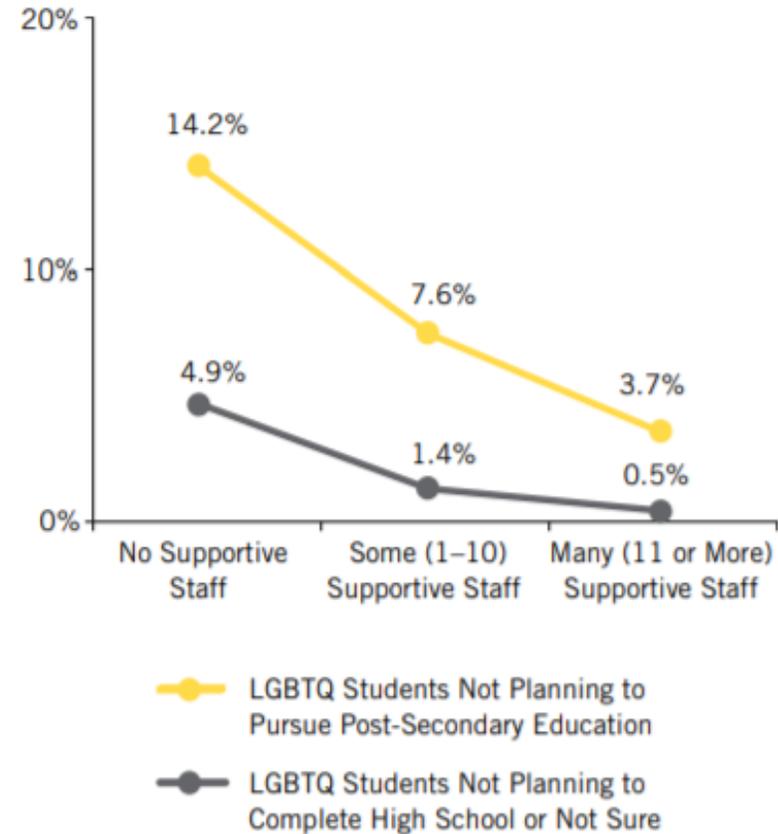


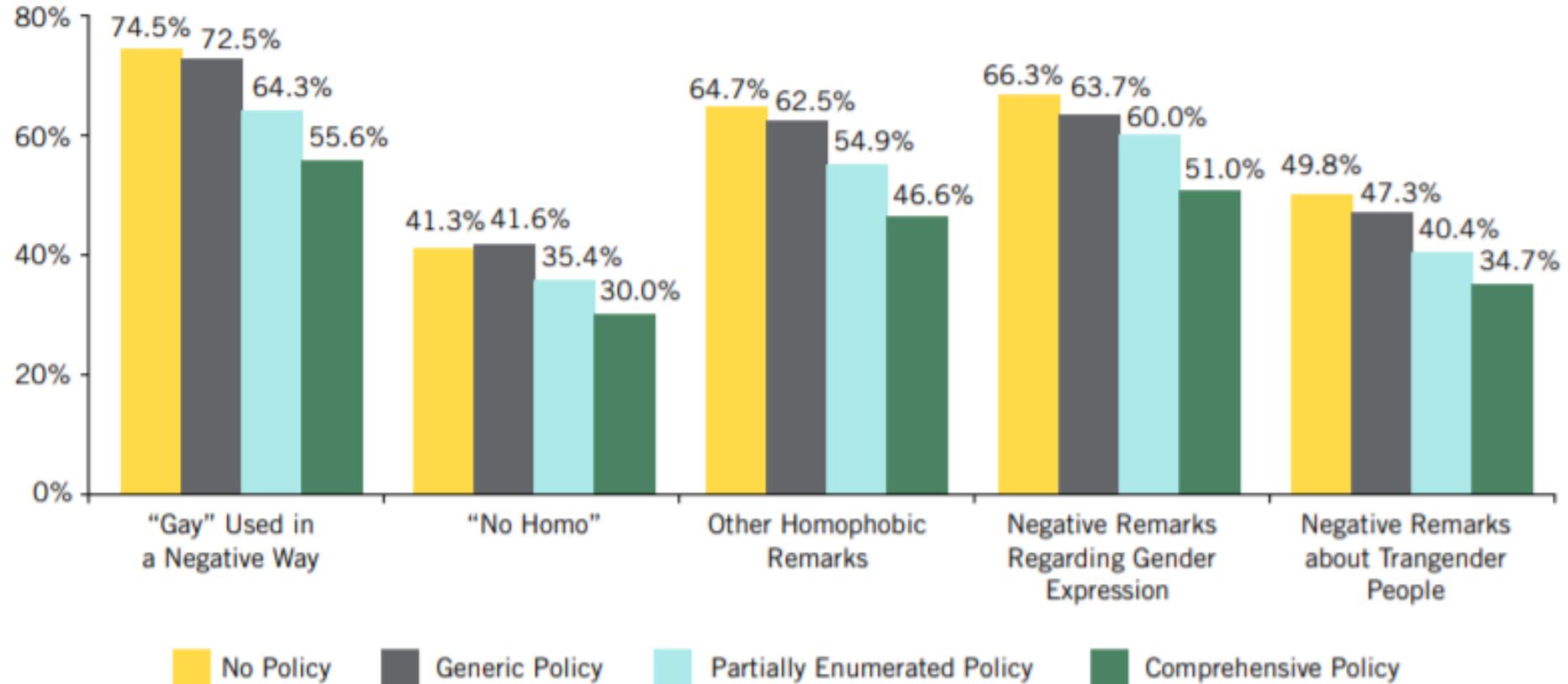
Figure 2.19 Supportive School Staff and Educational Aspirations



Data shows that when LGBTQ youth have more supportive staff in their lives, they feel safer, are more likely to go to school, and become more likely to pursue secondary education and complete high school.

(GLSEN, 2017)

Figure 2.26 School Harassment/Assault Policies and Frequency of Hearing Anti-LGBTQ Remarks
 (Percentage of LGBTQ Students Hearing Remarks Often or Frequently)



Research has also found that when schools implement more and more comprehensive policies, their environment becomes overall less hostile towards LGBTQ youth.

(GLSEN, 2017)

“Developing a critical awareness of systems of privilege and oppression is necessary, because without this awareness, one cannot take action.” – from *Critical Consciousness: A Critique and Critical Analysis of the Literature* by Alexis Jemal, LCSW, JD, PhD





Anti-Oppressive Action

The key to critical consciousness lies not just in questioning oppressive systems, but in taking action as a result of doing so.

- » Action occurs at both the individual and community level
- » Let's go back to our question: Why are LGBTQ youth disproportionately likely to be homeless? Now that we've addressed and answered that question by using anti-oppressive thought – let's take it a step further. What can we *do* to make a change?

What can *you* do to make a difference?

Actions you can take as an individual or as a community to make change:

- » Go to trainings to learn more (individually, as an agency)
- » Coordinate trainings in an area where there are no LGBTQ resources
- » Add questions to a survey about LGBTQ youth's experiences and critically reflecting on the results, even if they aren't positive
- » Join an LGBTQ ally group in your free time
- » Make a serious effort to listen to and not speak over the experiences of LGBTQ people in my life/at my place of work
- » Make a serious effort to hire (whether as staff or as interns) LGBTQ people
- » Propose protections for LGBTQ people be added to company policy (both for staff and clients)
- » Introduce comprehensive policy changes, including changes to intake process
- » Advocate for policy changes on a community-level (local, state, federal) that can support the LGBTQ community
- » Provide individual and family counseling services that assist in coping and connecting to community resources – this includes helping the family and reducing family conflict related to identity, and finding safe spaces if home is unsafe
- » Consider gender identity and sexual orientation when making matches in a mentoring program
- » Alter bathroom signage to show that all genders are welcome in a bathroom
- » Hang safe space signage around your building after ensuring the space will be safe

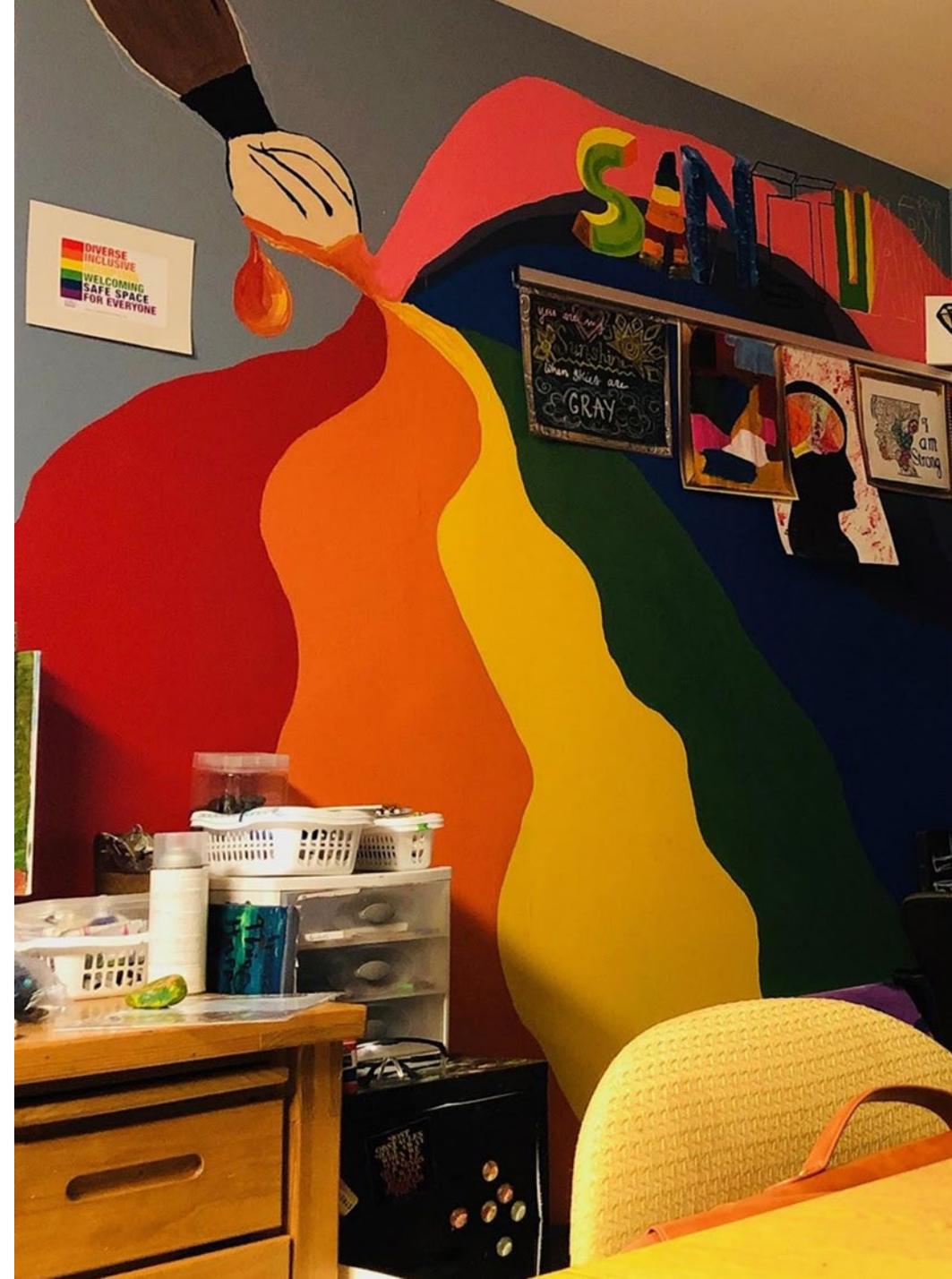
The steps we've taken

What we've done:

- » Equal Gender Access Policy
- » All-gender restroom signage
- » Quarterly training – internal and external
- » Signage to indicate safe space (after training)
- » Asking for pronouns and gender identity at intake
- » Individual and family counseling

What we've noticed:

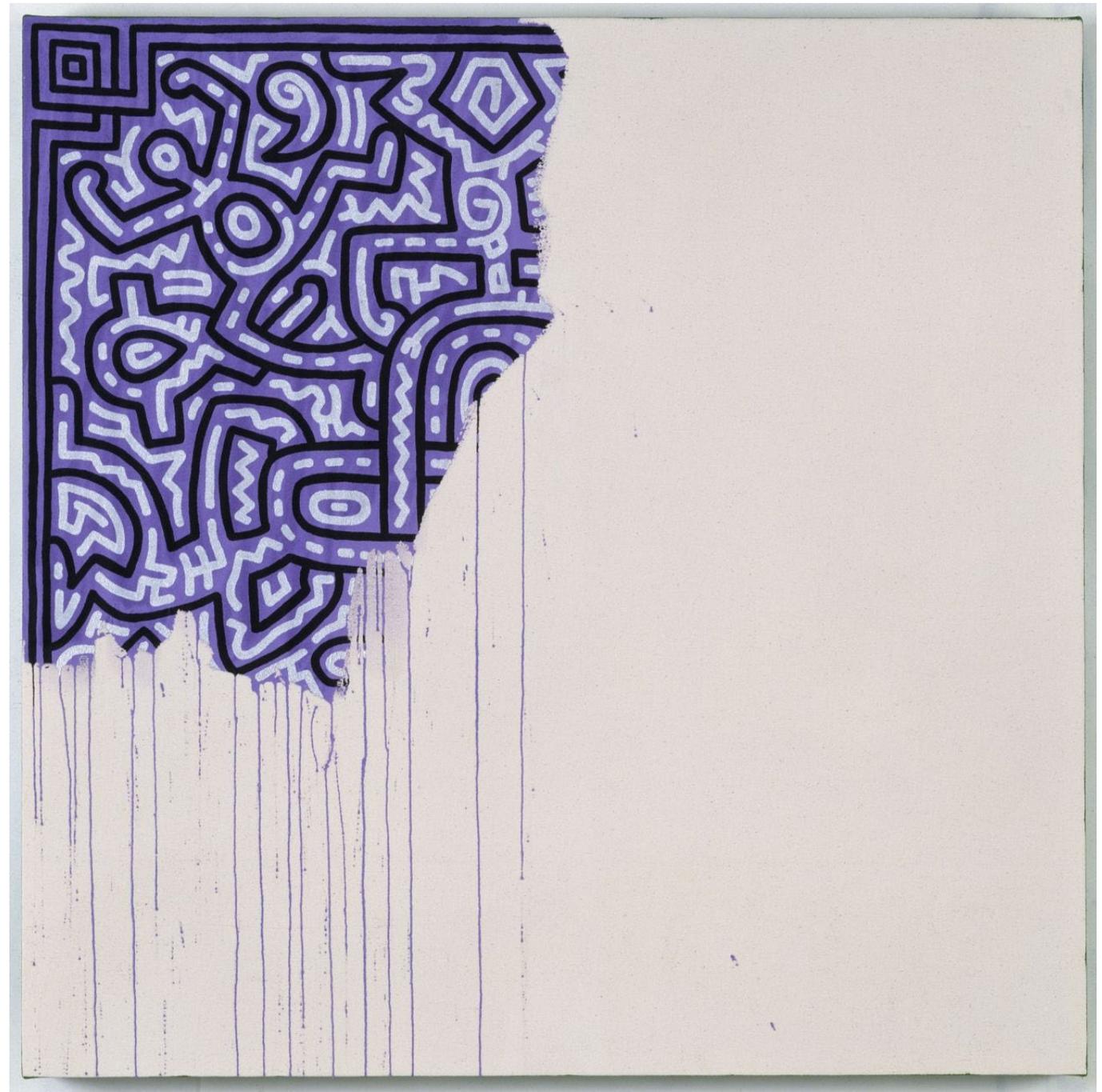
- » Increased comfort in self-expression among clients
- » Noticeable increase of youth/staff connection and support
- » Youth entering into mentorships
- » Staff improvements in critical consciousness and redirecting negative behavior



In Closing

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[LGBTQ ARTIST PLAYLIST](#)



Citations

- » Kumagai, A. K., & Lypson, M. L. (2009). Beyond Cultural Competence: Critical Consciousness, Social Justice, and Multicultural Education. *Academic Medicine*, 84(6), 782–787. doi: 10.1097/acm.0b013e3181a42398
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- » Human Rights Campaign. (2019, June). HRC State Maps. Retrieved from <https://www.hrc.org/state-maps>
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- » Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Zongrone, A. D., Clark, C. M., & Truong, N. L. (2018). The 2017 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation’s schools. New York: GLSEN.
- » Jemal, Alexis. “Critical Consciousness: A Critique and Critical Analysis of the Literature.” *The Urban Review*, vol. 49, no. 4, Feb. 2017, pp. 602–626., doi:10.1007/s11256-017-0411-3.

Thank You!

Please complete the evaluation for this session.

Click on the link in the Chat, then select:

Day One

Workshop

How to Employ Critical Consciousness When Working with LGBTQ Youth