

LGBTQ+ Youth Legislative Theatre Project

**Mandala Center for Change
Port Townsend, WA**

August – September 2017

Final Report

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WHY IS THIS PROJECT IMPORTANT?

In 2016, the Human Rights Campaign tracked at least 23 deaths of transgender people in the United States due to fatal violence, the most ever recorded. These victims were killed by acquaintances, partners and strangers, some of whom have been arrested and charged, while others have yet to be identified. Sadly, 2017 has already seen at least 23 transgender people fatally shot or killed by other violent means. (<https://www.hrc.org/resources/violence-against-the-transgender-community-in-2017>)

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death in the United States, and, as reported by the Trevor Project, “40% of transgender adults reported having made a suicide attempt. 92% of these individuals reported having attempted suicide before the age of 25.” (<http://www.thetrevorproject.org/pages/facts-about-suicide>).

According to a survey by the Williams Institute for Suicide prevention, 4.6 percent of the overall U.S. population has self-reported a suicide attempt, with that number climbing to between 10 and 20 percent for lesbian, gay or bisexual respondents. By comparison, 41 percent of trans or gender non-conforming people surveyed have attempted suicide. (<http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/AFSP-Williams-Suicide-Report-Final.pdf>)

People identifying as LGBTQ+, particularly transgender adults and youth, experience tremendous stress and anxiety due to anti-transgender bias, discrimination, and ignorance. Given the reality faced by members of this often invisible community, Mandala Center founder and project lead facilitator, Marc Weinblatt was inspired to initiate this project after hearing several queer and trans youth speak at a local anti-hate rally about their increased fears of survival in the current political climate since the election. As an arts and social justice organization we considered how best we could amplify the voices of these young people and support their human rights. How could we put these issues in front of the people who could affect direct change? Legislative Theatre was the answer.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

The LGBTQ+ Youth Legislative Theatre project was the third Legislative Theatre project of the Mandala Center (2015 – in Port Townsend on issues of healthcare access and affordability, 2016 – in Port Angeles on the education system.) This project was aimed at social change and public education around the issues of local Queer and Transgender youth. It gave youth an opportunity to connect with local resources and peers. It also provided an opportunity to participate in the democratic process and gain experiential knowledge of how the legislative process works.

Seven young people (ages 14-22), who self-identified as LGBTQ+, participated in a 5-day Theatre of the Oppressed workshop in August 2017. Through community building games, Image Theatre, and other participatory techniques, they were invited to explore their struggles with issues they identify as threats to themselves in their lives living in Jefferson County. As a group, they told their stories and created a short play that depicted some of these struggles. This 9-minute play, created by the youth, formed the basis of two interactive theatre performances at the end of September 2017 for the general public and invited legislators and policy makers.

The public events were comprised of three parts:

- 1) Presentation of the play – “Queer Survival Quest”.
- 2) Forum Theatre – the play was performed a second time at which point the audience was invited to stop the play, come on stage, replace a character, and improvise their solutions.
- 3) Legislative Theatre – Finally the audience was invited to propose new laws and policies in a mock legislature. The proposals were reviewed and culled by a special “Panel of Experts” on the issues. The selected proposals were then presented one at a time with audience members invited to advocate for or against the proposal. The audience was then invited to vote to approve, reject, or abstain from each proposal by holding up green, red, or yellow index cards, respectively. Remote viewers voted and were counted as well.

ATTENDANCE DATA

- 7 LGBTQ+ youth + 1 youth assistant facilitator participated in the full project.
- 150 audience members attended the two performances.
- 13 Legislators and policy makers attended one or both performances. (See list following.)
- 20+ people participated remotely from around the world via the video live-stream, including from Nepal, Toronto, Georgia, Alabama, and along the U.S. west coast.
- 1600 people have viewed the “Facebook Live” live-stream video since the performances happened.
- A yet unknown number will attend the public presentation at the PT Public Library – date TBD.
...Along with the many volunteers and local professionals who supported the project.

List of Legislators who attended LGBTQ+ Legislative Theatre performances:

Monday, Sept. 25

Mike Evans, Port Townsend (PT) Chief of Police
 Matt Ready, Jefferson County Hospital Commissioner
 Carrie Ehrhardt, PT High School Principal
 Brian MacKenzie, Chimacum HS Principal
 Patrick Gaffney, Blue Heron Middle School Principal
 Connie Welch, PT School Board
 Laura Tucker, PT School Board
 Luann Rodgers, Chimacum School Board

Tuesday, Sept. 26

Mike Chapman, State of Washington House Representative
 David Faber, PT City Council
 Amy Howard, PT City Council
 Deborah Stinson, PT City Council / Mayor
 Rita Helmsley, Jefferson Community School, Head of School

LGBTQ+ YOUTH LEGISLATIVE THEATRE PROPOSALS READ & VOTED ON

The following proposals were read and voted on, in our mock legislature, by on-site audience plus (on the first night) by a remote audience voting via video live-stream. Before voting, audience members were invited to come onstage and advocate for or against the proposal - two people for and two people against, 60 seconds maximum each. To cast their vote, voters held up colored index cards as follows:

Green – “Yea” (Pass)

Red – “Nay” (Reject)

Yellow – “Abstention” (No vote - undecided or not ready to pass proposal as written)

Mon, Sept. 25 – Performance #1

1) Required training for educators. (PASSED)

Green – 48 – (45 +3 remote)

Yellow – 3

Red – 0

2) Have mandatory LGBTQ specific advocates/counselors in schools. (PASSED)

Green – 46 (43 +3 remote)

Yellow – 6

Red – 1

3) With picture ID, all gender markers need to be removed from all official documents. (PASSED W/ Caution)

Green – 17 (16 +1 remote)

Yellow – 21

Red – 8 (6 +2 remote)

4) Prescriptions should be accepted with proper name change documentation. (PASSED)

Green – 53 (50 +3 remote)

Yellow – 1

Red – 0

5) Mandatory Education for all healthcare providers in all fields. (PASSED)

Green – 45 (43 +2 remote)

Yellow – 7

Red – 1 (0 + 1 remote)

6) Include inclusive gender non-binary education in sex-ed classes. (PASSED)

Green – 48

Yellow – 0

Red – 0

Six out of six Proposals PASSED.

Tues, Sept. 26 – Performance #2

7) Eliminate gender specific dress codes in public schools. (PASSED)

Green – 42

Yellow – 2

Red – 1

8) All people should be allowed to use whichever gender assigned restroom they feel most comfortable. This right should be protected by anti-discrimination laws in and out of public institutions. (PASSED w/ Caution)

Green – 27

Yellow – 16

Red – 9

9) Require gender-neutral inclusive bathrooms in all schools and public buildings. (PASSED)

Green – 47

Yellow – 2

Red – 0

10) Health insurers in the state of WA must have a one-year grace period on name changes on policies. (PASSED)

Green – 41

Yellow – 10

Red – 0

11) Legalize explicit Affirmative Action for people who identify as LGBTQ+ in recruitment for jobs, college students, education leadership positions. (REJECTED)

Green – 14

Yellow – 16

Red – 19

12) Adopt a Transgender “Bill of Rights” that includes:

- legal protections from bias and harassment in all public spaces.

- access to low cost / no cost legal mediation to resolve issues of discrimination.

- community court for offenders that includes education.

(REJECTED)

Green – 7

Yellow – 12

Red – 32

Four of Six proposals PASSED.

Summary of proposal voting from both performances combined:

12 Proposals were read.

8 Proposals passed with high majority and minimal abstention.

2 Proposals passed with caution (many abstentions.)

2 Proposals were rejected.

PROJECT SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

A video from the performance of the play, “Queer Survival Quest”, (11 minutes) is available for viewing on the Mandala Center website: <http://www.mandalaforchange.com/resources/video/>. (first video.) In addition, a short video summary of the project will be available on the same page soon.

Though certainly not comprehensive on the multitude of issues faced by transgender youth nor the LGBTQ+ community as a whole, major topics addressed in this project and performance included:

- General safety
- School environment, including classrooms and bathrooms
- Hospital / healthcare system and personnel
- Family and friends

Based on the proposals passed and consultation with members of LGBTQ+ youth adult communities, we recommend the following:

- Required Education / Sensitivity Training on LGBTQ+ issues (with a particular focus on transgender/non-binary specific needs and concerns) in all major institutions including schools, healthcare, police and fire departments, etc. as well as the general public.
- A solution for at least one gender-neutral bathroom in all schools as well as institutions such as the hospital, workplaces, and public restrooms. In schools, letting transgender students use the staff bathroom is not a satisfactory solution. They want to be treated like other (Cis/non-trans) students.
- A grace period or other solution for name changes and gender marker classification changes, particularly as it affects healthcare and other basic needs.
- Strengthen and support anti-discrimination laws, on every level – local, state, federal.

There are several outcomes already in process since the performances:

In the schools:

Immediately following the performances, Port Townsend High School Principal, Carrie Ehrhardt, invited Beau Ohlgren and Teresa Shiraishi, local gender and sexuality educators, to give an all-staff training. They chose to dedicate their regular monthly meeting in December to how they can better support transgender students as they realized how important this issue is for today's youth.

At the hospital:

Mike Glenn, CEO of Jefferson Healthcare (JHC), has contracted the Mandala Center to produce a video to help train healthcare providers and support staff on the needs of the transgender community, in order to better serve them. This will focus on the needs of transgender youth and adults.

In addition, JHC is consulting with local LGBTQ+ youth to improve training and education of providers and staff on transgender youth needs and concerns. This continues the recently implemented LGBTQ 101 classes taught at JHC by local educators, Emelia de Souza, Martin Anthony, & Sarafina Landis.

In the media:

YES magazine did a feature on the project in their online issue: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/trans-youth-use-theater-to-raise-awareness-and-change-policy-20171106/>

From an organizational point of view, seeing outcomes already in process, and feedback from all those involved, we deem this project a success. In the words of some of the youth participants:

“Combining theatre and activism is a super effective way for me to put change into the world I’m living in.” - Liv, age 15

“It’s important to me for schools to be on the same page as their students, including transgender students.” - Max, age 14

“With this project, we can improve not only our queer community but our community as a whole.”
- Sam, age 20



Appendix A

Gender Glossary 101

CIS or CISGENDER

Someone whose gender identity is aligned with the sex assigned to them at birth. “Cis-” is a Latin prefix meaning “on the same side as.”

GENDER

Roles, behaviors and activities that a given society considers appropriate for males or females. “Sex” and “gender” are often mistakenly used interchangeably.

GENDER IDENTITY

Internal, deeply held sense of one’s gender.

GENDER NONCONFORMING

Expressing gender outside of conventions typically associated with socially constructed masculinity or femininity. Not all nonconformists are transgender.

GENDERFLUID or PANGENDER

Having a fluid identity. Might be expressed as both male and female, or shift from one gender to the other. Under the umbrella term genderqueer.

GENDERQUEER or NON-BINARY

A gender identity that falls outside of the male/female binary. A third gender.

INTERSEX

A general term used for when a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not fit the typical definitions of (just) female or (just) male.

SEX

Classification as male or female or intersex (not exclusively male or female). Sex is usually assigned based on external anatomy, but is determined by many characteristics such as chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs. Natal Sex is one’s biological sex assigned at birth.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Romantic, physical attraction, be it homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, asexual, polysexual, pansexual.

TRANSGENDER

Umbrella term for any gender identity that differs from the one associated with the sex assigned at birth.

TRANS*

Short for transgender, with the asterisk meant to indicate the wide range of identities beyond the norm.