A Blueprint for Progress: Strategies for Promoting System Change and Better Outcomes for LGBTQ Youth of Color in Child Welfare

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DESIRED RESULTS

• Increase capacity for practice change and continuous quality improvement

• Increase understanding of effective policies for promoting better outcomes for LGBTQ and gender expansive youth of color

• Engage with others in identifying strategies to better support system change efforts
PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

• Setting the context
• Opportunities to improve outcomes:
  • Practice
  • System reform
  • Policy
• Q&A
  • Resources
What is SOGIE?
WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

• Intersectionality: intersection of multiple forms of oppression
  • Race, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, etc.
• Limited policies, program and practices that are intersectional
• Systems are capturing data on gender and race at best, lack nuanced data
HERE’S WHAT WE KNOW...

- **Children and youth of color and those who identify as LGBTQ+** experience poorer outcomes compared to their peers.

- **22.8 percent** of children in out-of-home care identify as LGBTQ.

- **57 percent** of LGBTQ youth were youth of color.

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CHILD WELFARE DOES NOT OPERATE IN ISOLATION

• Families and youth face overlapping systemic barriers (concentrated poverty, access to safe housing, employment)

• Intersecting factors have a strong impact on children and youth of color (race, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status)

• Exposure to stress and racial discrimination have lasting negative effects on child and family well-being
Skye was kicked out of her home at the age of 15, when she started to identify as a Black transgender woman. At 16, Skye found herself in the child welfare system and placed in a congregate care facility in a mid-western state. Skye’s child welfare placement was decided based on her assigned gender at birth, and she was sent to live in an all-male group home. The staff constantly make jokes about Skye’s non-binary gender expression, and she would also get into fights which often caused the staff to call the police as a disciplinary method. She ran away and started to couch surf with friends she met online. Skye now resides in a transitional living program, where there are no gender neutral restrooms.
Table Talk: Guiding Questions

• Are there biases at play?

• How could systems provide concrete supports for Skye?

• What practice and policy changes could be implemented to better support Skye?
You and a colleague have been invited to consult with officials at the Child-First County Department of Children and Family Services to talk about effective strategies for engaging families and other community members in the agency’s continuing system improvement and planning processes. During an early consultative discussion there is agreement to form a Community Advisory Committee, which would include – among other individuals – a representative from the existing youth advisory council and at least one parent who has experienced having a child removed and placed in foster care. During the continuing discussion, someone asks whether the race and SOGIE of any young people and parents who will be invited to join matters. The Child Protective Services administrator responds that “I know there are people who think race and SOGIE influences everything we do around here, but it doesn’t. This is not about that racial disproportionality and overrepresentation of SOGIE discussion people keep pushing. This is about us finding people who understand and appreciate what we do, and can give us another perspective as we continue to improve how we respond to families.” Without further exploring the comment, the Director acknowledges that “…as you might assume, there is some history to this here, and it’s obviously something people get very passionate about.” This comment happens with 10 minutes remaining in the meeting.
Table Talk: Guiding Questions

• How would you and your colleague handle this?

• Is there a biased perspective at play, if so why?

• How could this perspective and this decision impact young people?

• What would you recommend the system do or implement to address these biases?
WHAT WE KNOW...

To *thrive*, **all** young people need:

- Affirming Placements
- Medical and Behavioral Health Care
- Safe Schools
- Support Transition from Care/Aftercare Services
- External Connections
- Connections to Family and Supportive Social Networks
HOW DO WE GET THERE...

- Federal policy
- State and local policy
- Placement regulations
- System Reform
- Practice Change
GUIDANCE FROM YOUTH ACROSS THE COUNTRY

• 50+ LGBTQ youth of color involved with child welfare systems
• 20 jurisdictions, within 16 states
• Urban, rural, suburban
Systems Change Allegheny Initiative

• Building workforce capacity through SOGIE-focused trainings

• Creating and implementing SOGIE-affirming Standards of Practice for systems under Allegheny County DHS
  - Communication Related to Sexual Orientation Gender Identity and Expression
  - Expectations for Serving LGBTQ Individuals
  - Housing and Placement with LGBTQ Individuals
  - Making LGBTQ Appropriate Referrals
  - Understanding Disclosure Related to SOGIE Information
  - Working with LGBTQ Individuals Professional Expectations

• Innovations in information management systems to accommodate the inclusion of SOGIE-related information

• Building sustainability by integrating SOGIE into existing projects or processes
Strategies – Opportunities for Improving Practice

Safety and Affirmation

Well-being

Permanency

Agency Accountability

Supporting and Affirming LGBTQ Youth of Color
“I feel like in foster care they worry about safety so much from a physical point of view but you can also be emotionally and verbally abused so much to where you do physical damage to yourself. [It’s important for the foster care system to] also have some type of rules or regulations on verbal abuse because if you say someone is doing something to you physically then they’ll do something but if you say someone is saying something they’ll tell you to ignore them, but there’s only so much you can do as a person.”
Strategies – Safety and affirmation

• Safety in schools

• Safety in placements
  • Initial and ongoing training for agency staff and caretakers
  • Nonverbal signals of affirmation
  • Address implicit bias

• Targeting efforts to address human trafficking
  • Engage with young people in crafting language
  • Demographic questions in screening tools
Well-being

“If we incorporate basic information about LGBTQ to sex education classes in school [it would] help us have a more open conversation. I mean, [being a student is] really our only job at that age, so it is where we are and what we are doing.”

“A girl was placed in my group home and [upon intake] she noted that she liked girls.” In turn, some of the group home staff severely limited her interactions with other girls, just in case they would have been perceived as intimate, even as simple as sitting next to another peer on the couch. “It’s like they think if you are a lesbian, you like EVERY girl. Straight people get to sit next to and interact with whoever they want.”
Strategies – Well-being in out-of-home care

• Promoting healthy SOGIE development
• Appropriately implementing reasonable and prudent parenting standards (*Tennessee and New Mexico*)
• Promoting least restrictive, most family-like settings
• Ensuring access to timely and appropriate health care
Permanency

“There’s just that one family member that you feel safe around and you never want to leave their side, and I never want to leave my grandma’s side. I’ve been with her since I was a baby. My grandma knew I liked girls, and she never told my mom.”
Strategies – Permanency

• Use family engagement models to support kinship designations as defined by youth

• Support youth’s transition to adulthood
  • Maintain a list of LGBTQ-friendly employers
  • Connect youth with legal providers
Quality Service Review (QSR) as a mechanism for Accountability and Continuous Quality Improvement

- Qualitative means of understanding system and practice performance
- Multiple methods of data collection
- Allows for real-time feedback on the case, practice, and system levels
- Collects data on status of the child and family and system performance
### Systems Change Allegheny Initiative

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| Indicators:    | • Stability  
                  • Living Arrangement  
                  • Permanency                                 |
| Questions to Consider: | 1. Do the caregivers know and understand the child’s sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression?  |
|                | 2. What is their level of acceptance?                                       |
|                | 3. If they do not know how the youth identifies, do they have any beliefs or values that may make the youth feel uncomfortable? |
|                | 4. Has the youth experienced threats of being kicked out of their home, or actually kicked out of their home, because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression? (This can look like parent/teen conflict around who the youth brings home or hangs out with or clothes the youth wears, or the youth frequently staying out because they do not feel comfortable in the home, among other things.) |
|                | 5. What activities do the caregivers/birth parents other important adults with whom permanency is being explored do with the child/youth to support the child/youth’s identity? |
FEDERAL POLICY LANDSCAPE

• Department of Health and Human Services non-discrimination in federally-funded agencies:
  • “It is a public policy requirement of HHS that no person otherwise eligible will be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination in the administration of HHS programs and services based on non-merit factors such as age, disability, sex, race, color, national origin, religion, gender identity, or sexual orientation.”

• Title IX non-discrimination in education programs or activities

• Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data collection
PLACEMENT: STATE LICENSING REGULATIONS

• Definitions of sex and gender
• Admission procedures and facility licensing
• Bedrooms
• Clothing
• Body searches
• Training requirements
WHAT’S NEXT...

• What opportunities exist in your practice to promote well-being for LGBTQ youth of color?

• What barriers currently exist?

• What action steps can you take when you get back next week? In the next month?
Additional Resources

Policy:

• Out of the Shadows: Supporting LGBTQ Youth in Child Welfare through Cross-System Collaboration
• A Blueprint for Progress: A Policy Guide for Advocates Supporting LGBTQ Youth of Color in Child Welfare Systems
• Safe Havens: Closing the Gap Between Recommended Practice and Reality for Transgender and Gender Expansive Youth in Out-of-Home care
• Bridging the Language Gap in Child Welfare: Identifying and Supporting LGBTQ Youth who have Experienced Sexual Exploitation

Practice:

• Guidelines for Managing Information Related to the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression of Children in Child Welfare Systems
• Allegheny County SOGIE-Affirming Standards of Practice
  • Communication Related to Sexual Orientation Gender Identity and Expression
  • Expectations for Serving LGBTQ Individuals
  • Housing and Placement with LGBTQ Individuals
  • Making LGBTQ Appropriate Referrals
  • Understanding Disclosure Related to SOGIE Information
  • Working with LGBTQ Individuals Professional Expectations

CSSP getR.E.A.L Initiative
Questions??
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