Supporting LGBTQ Communities While Navigating a Changing Landscape DUSTY JEPKEMA LMSW

## Dusty Jepkema LMSW

Clinical Social Worker – Integrated Services of Kalamazoo Co-Facilitator: Justice, Equity, and Trauma Team (JETT) Non-Binary (They, Them) Queer Identifying Career spans several areas of social

work

- Indian Child Welfare
- Report on Housing and Racial Equity
- Homelessness and Housing
- Transition to Independence Program



### **Objectives for Today**

 Identify 3 ways in which you can demonstrate your and/or your agency as a safe space

 Lean about additional barriers LGBTQ individuals are facing to accessing and utilizing services

• Analyze additional impacts and stressors to the LGBTQ community in regard to changing policies.

# **The Flying Gender Unicorn**

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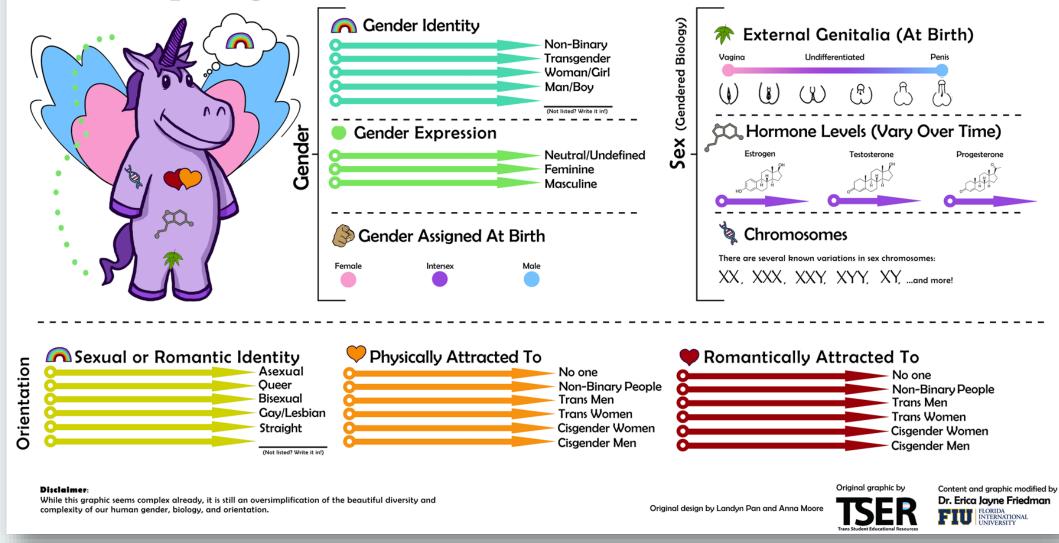




Image from Sojourn: https://sojourngsd.org/gsdedresources/

# "You Don't Exist"



Myth: LGBTQ people do not exist in rural communities

Fact: Approximately 2.9-3.8 million LGBTQ people live in rural communities across the us (National Rural Health Association)

#### LGBTQ Youth Mental Health Outcomes

#### Key Findings \*The Trevor Project

Compared to LGBTQ+ young people living in non-rural areas, those in rural areas:

- Face higher rates of victimization, including physical threats or harm (27% vs. 22%) and bullying (56% vs. 47%).
- Report fewer supportive spaces, including at home (34% vs. 41%) and school (40% vs. 53%).
- Are half as likely to say their community is supportive (34% vs. 67%), with TGNB young people reporting even lower rates (31% TGNB vs. 40% cisgender rural youth).
- Are more likely to have considered suicide (43% vs. 38%).
- Have less access to mental health care, with only 47% of those who wanted care able to get it, compared to 51% in non-rural areas.

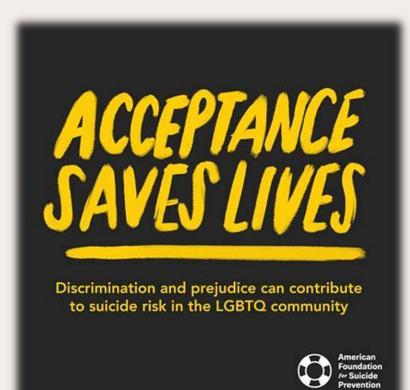
US Transgender Survey found that 81.7% reported suicidal ideation in their lifetime and 48.3% had suicidal thoughts in the past year

Trans adult suicidal ideation was found to be 12 times higher than general population and suicide attempt rate 18 times higher – US Transgender Survey

Trans and non-binary youth 2 to 2.5 times as likely to experience depressive symptom, seriously consider suicide and attempt suicide compared to cis LGBQ peers

### Transgender Suicide Statistics

\*2022 US Trans Survey



#### What are the Barriers



Navigating mental health care feels like a unnavigable maze for many: Where to go?

Insurance?

Who is at the other end?

Stigma = Crazy people



Levesque Framework for Accessibility

# It Starts with Stigma

#### Conservative Views:

- Sexually Immoral
- Harmful to the community
- Out to convince your children to be gay
- "The Gay Agenda"
- Illness to be cured
- Response to trauma = Messed Up
- Not born that way/response to poor nurturing

#### Religious Beliefs:

- Rejected by the religious doctrine
- Inherently immoral/tainted/broken
- Doomed to eternal punishment
- Possession of evil forces/the devil
- Should be cast out/seen as a stain on community

#### Compounding Barriers for LGBTQ + Communities

# Hypervigilance to Signals:

- Noticing Language used
- How significant others are identified/language on written documents
- Comments made by others in every setting

#### Betrayal Trauma:

- Violation of trust by a person or institution who the individual relied on for safety and/or support
- Reminder: Trauma is real or perceived
- High risk of rejection/betrayal

#### Compounding Barriers for LGBTQ + Communities

#### Assumptions/Beliefs:

- Treated as though sexuality is cause of all issues/misalignment of needs
- Heteronormative standards

#### Where to go:

- Travel distance
- Other people will see me

#### Lack of Knowledge:

- Not knowing what is available
- Fear of learning/seeking out information
- Providers not understanding specific needs
- Meaning well providers without experience
- Appropriate specific screenings/interventions

# Focused populations

Communities of Color

- Additional stigma toward people of color as minorities in rural communities
- Additions stigma within communities of color
- Increased risk of poor mental health outcomes and suicide risk due to lack of support

Transgender Community

- <u>Healthcare is suicide prevention</u>
- Lack of access to healthcare resources, or reduction of resources
- Lack of access to services for basic needs
- Increased risk of threats to physical safety and hate crimes

## The Changing Landscape: 2025 anti-trans bills tracker

In 2025, anti-trans bills continue to be introduced across the country. We track legislation that seeks to block trans people from receiving basic healthcare, education, legal recognition, and the right to publicly exist.

857 bills 49 states 77 passed 731 active 49 failed

VA to phase out treatment for gender dysphoria

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE March 17, 2025 10:59 am

Home / Press Room

All savings from this change will go to helping paralyzed Veterans and amputees

#### The ACLU is tracking 569 Anti-LGBTQ bills in the U.S.

Choose a state on the map to show the different bills targeting LGBTQ Rights and take action. While not all of these bills will become law, they all cause harm for LGBTQ people.

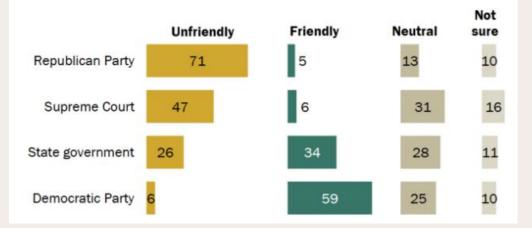
Last updated on April 11, 2025 (i)

Most LGBTQ adults expect Trump's policies to affect gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans people negatively

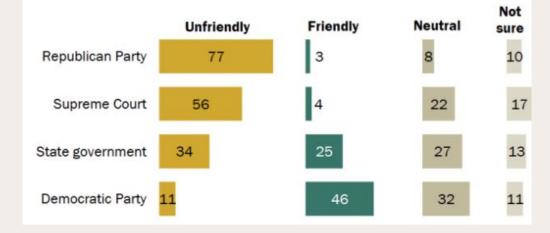


# "Most LGBTQ adults see the GOP as unfriendly toward people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender."

% of LGBTQ adults saying each of the following is generally \_\_\_\_\_ toward **people who are gay, lesbian or bisexual** 



% of LGBTQ adults saying each of the following is generally \_\_\_\_\_ toward **people who are transgender** 



Pew Research Center January 2025

# Signaling for Safety

- Targeted approaches/resources for LGBTQ individuals
  - Change language on documentation
  - Be aware of language used during assessments/introductions/rapport building/outreach
  - Balance in providing affirming services
- Reducing stigma
  - Utilize weight of agency for advocacy, non-discrimination policies
  - Partner with LGBTQ and Non-LGBTQ targeted resources (Allyship is essential)
  - Don't attack people, address ideas
  - Build relationships with LGBTQ community

### Training is Essential

- Competency in understanding LGBTQ needs and concerns
- Affirm, don't dismiss
- Don't assume that sexuality is the problem
- A lack of knowledge/understanding can lead to more harm
  - False sense of safety
  - Assumptions of needs
  - Healthy relationships
  - Causes and impact of trauma
- It is ok to still be learning and you don't have to be an expert. Just be cautious and seek support and consultation from those in the community.

- Out Center Southwest Michigan
- OutFront Kalamazoo
- Battle Creek Pride
- Grand Rapides Pride Center
- Affirmations

### Resources

- Ruth Ellis Center
- Transgender Michigan
- GLAAD
- ACLU
- WPATH
- The Trevor Project
- Trans Lifeline

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# Thank You

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