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EQuALITY: Empowering Queer, Allied, and Trans* Youth

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LGBTQQ identified youth are often targets in school settings for harassment, maltreatment, and bullying. This negative treatment often leads to decreased academic performance and limited potential for successful long-term outcomes. Through school and community-wide programming, EQuALITY seeks to increase acceptance of LGBTQQ identified students, foster self-empowerment, and support young adults as they navigate different social environments and interactions between LGBTQQ identified students and allies. The authors hypothesize that with the creation and implementation of EQuALITY, a program designed to create a widespread shift in LGBTQQ acceptance and understanding from the school community, students' feelings of isolation will decrease, feelings of acceptance will increase, and academic performance will improve. Furthermore, the services offered by EQuALITY will strengthen students' sense of empowerment as leaders within the school environment and the community at large. While this article focuses specifically on the needs of students attending a middle school in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, the model is applicable in school settings nationwide.

Keywords: Youth, Young Adult, Empowerment, LGBTQ, School Programs, Identity, Community, Student Life, Counseling

School settings can be difficult for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQQ) youth to navigate, as these students are often targets for harassment, maltreatment, and bullying. The negative treatment students face because of their sexual orientation and gender identity often affects their health and well-being, and leads to decreased academic performance and limited potential for successful long-term outcomes. Furthermore, LGBTQQ students of racial and ethnic minorities are at an increased risk of low-level performance and negative outcomes. Services are needed nationwide to support LGBTQQ minority youth who are struggling with issues of acceptance and the impacts of the school's heteronormative culture. This article focuses specifically on the needs of youth attending a middle school in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, New York. The authors hypothesize that with the creation and implementation of EQuALITY, a program designed

to create a widespread shift in LGBTQQ acceptance and understanding from the school community, students' feelings of isolation will decrease, feelings of acceptance will increase, and academic performance will improve. Furthermore, the services offered by EQuALITY will strengthen students' sense of empowerment as leaders within the school environment and the community at large. Although this program in particular is designed for the students and local community in Bedford-Stuyvesant, the model can be replicated in other school settings.

EQuALITY aims to uphold social justice for LGBTQQ students by providing these students with the social services and support needed to reduce feelings of isolation, suicidality, and anxiety, and to increase attendance, performance, and the likelihood of long-term successful outcomes. All too often, students who identify as LGBTQQ face a lack of services in schools; EQuALITY offers

these services to students with the intention of creating a student body and larger school community that is safer, more cohesive, supportive, open to diversity, and accepting of LGBTQQ identified students.

Program Overview

Mission Statement

The mission of EQuALITY is to strengthen social and emotional support for LGBTQQ identified students and their allies, and build a more inclusive and LGBTQQ supportive school environment.

Goals

1. Increase acceptance of students' diverse gender and sexual identities within the school.
2. Foster self-empowerment between LGBTQQ identified youth and their allies.
3. Support successful navigation of different social environments and interactions between LGBTQQ identified youth and their allies.

Objectives

Short-Term (to be evaluated at completion of 1 academic year of programming):

1. 70% of the entire student population understands the difference between gender, sexuality, and their spectrums.
2. 80% of LGBTQQ identified students have the knowledge to define oppression and the ability to relate it to their experience as a social pattern.
3. 80% of Q/GSA members demonstrate leadership skills in facilitation and mediation.

Intermediate (to be evaluated 1 year post program completion):

1. 33% of student population, teachers, staff, and faculty report hearing less homophobic language used at school.
2. 40% of LGBTQQ students who were involved in the Q/GSA show an increase in self-esteem.
3. 80% of students involved in the support group achieve a GPA of 3.3 or higher, or work toward that goal by increasing their GPA by at least 0.5

points.

Long-Term (to be evaluated 2 years post program completion):

1. 30% reduction of physical and psychological harassment involving LGBTQQ students at school.
2. 40% of Q/GSA members have taken on leadership roles inside and outside of school.
3. 33% of students who participated in EQuALITY and identify as LGBTQQ report feeling more comfortable being open about their sexual identities to their families and community.

Social Problem

School settings are often challenging environments for young adults who identify as LGBTQQ. Students who identify as LGBTQQ face increased levels of marginalization and systematic oppression. They are also common targets for bullying and harassment, conditions that produce a number of social, emotional, and academic challenges for this population, including higher risk of anxiety and depression, self-harm, and suicidality (Wernick, Kulick, & Inglehart, 2013). Additionally, LGBTQQ students who are bullied generally feel unsafe in school due to their sexual orientation and gender identities, and thus, are at an increased risk for truancy and low academic performance (Wernick et al., 2013). As individuals and communities affect each other through a symbiotic relationship, conditions within a school environment inherently impact LGBTQQ students' experiences.

Community Context

The New York City Department of Education presented a quality snapshot of a middle school in Bedford-Stuyvesant between 2013 and 2014, which the authors analyzed for this program design. While the school's current student population is 200, the total student population during the time of the report was 165. Among the student population in 2014, 82% identified as racially Black, 15% as Hispanic, 1% as Asian, and another 1% as Caucasian. The overall student attendance rate is 92%. The report, which gathered feedback from students and faculty, states that 90% of

teachers and 81% of students are satisfied with the school's culture. Students at the school have access to technology, clubs—including leadership training—and a morning advisory class that permits students to talk about what is most important to them. An afterschool program also exists to enrich students' learning experiences by providing activities that reinforce their learning within the classroom and adds to student satisfaction. Stated by the report, an array of resources is provided for students that contribute to the school's academic culture.

According to the 2013–2014 Quality Snapshot (New York City Department of Education, 2014), 85% of students agreed that they feel welcome at the school. The majority of students reported feeling safe in the school hallways, locker rooms, and bathrooms, but only 46% of students reported that most students treat each other with respect. When asked about harassment or bullying between students based on social differences, such as gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, color, race, ethnicity, national origin, and religion, 37% of students reported that these types of harassment occur some of the time and 30% said they occur most or all of time. Regarding matters of conflict resolution, less than half of students agree that there is a staff member or program that helps students resolve conflicts, especially those related to social differences.

However, students and staff members are cultivating trusting connections, as students are revealing their experiences with being LGBTQQ to staff members. Students, mostly female, have indicated their need for a space to talk about existing same-sex relationships between students at the middle school. As a result of students becoming increasingly out and open about their sexuality and gender identity, violence against LGBTQQ students has been committed on school grounds. Based on the harassment that LGBTQQ students are facing at school and their desire for a space to talk about their experiences, the authors designed EQUALITY: Empowering **Q**ueer, **A**llied, and **T**rans* Youth. EQUALITY strives to strengthen social and emotional support for LGBTQQ students and their allies and build a more inclusive LGBTQQ supportive school environment.

Issues Being Addressed

EQUALITY is a pilot program at a school that currently lacks the services to support LGBTQQ students' sense of safety and empowerment. The authors hypothesize that if EQUALITY is implemented in the school, then students' feelings of isolation will reduce, feelings of safety will increase, and ultimately, they will have healthier long-term social, emotional, and academic outcomes. In addition, if LGBTQQ students and their allies are involved in EQUALITY, then they will help shift dominant cultural norms in the school community by challenging issues of heteronormativity, homophobia, and transphobia.

Conceptual Framework

EQUALITY is guided by critical theory, with particular attention to queer theory, and incorporates a strengths-based approach. Critical theory is centered upon an analytical, change-oriented lens of society. This theory has a macro orientation with a strong focus on working towards social justice. Rather than concentrating on the individual, critical theory focuses on the impact that dominant structures have on shaping the social constructions of race, class, gender, etc. (Hardcastle, Wenocur, & Powers, 2011; Pyles, 2013). Queer theory, which is closely connected to critical theory, focuses specifically on gender identity and sexual orientation. The crux of this theory focuses on breaking down traditional binaries and establishing identities outside the influence of dominant patriarchy (Pyles, 2013).

Case studies show that the use of a strengths-based approach with youth, particularly youth of color, is an effective method for empowerment and building leadership skills. According to Quermit and Conner (2003), "practitioners can advocate for youth of color to build positive identities so that the transition into adulthood can be marked by a foundation of successes and achievements rather than failures and detriments" (p. 1216). Empowerment work with young adults is most effective when the counselor focuses on assets and strengths of the individual or group. Furthermore, development of healthy feelings regarding gender identity, sexuality, race, and eth-

nicity is crucial for strength building among adolescent females of color (Quermit & Conner, 2003, p. 1216). Introducing young adults of color to issues about social and economic inequities and systematic oppression is an important framework for therapeutic change when using a strengths-based approach (Quermit & Conner, 2003, p. 1216). As the students at the school are largely youth of color, the authors believe using a strengths-based approach will be particularly impactful.

Intervention

EQuALITY has a multi-dimensional approach to tackle issues with multi-dimensional causations. Research shows that Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) are effective at ending isolation, creating a safer school environment, and providing a platform for building student leaders (Gay-Straight Alliance Network, n.d.; GLSEN, 2007). Based on these findings, EQuALITY will implement a bi-weekly Questioning/Gender and Sexuality Alliance (herein known as Q/GSA) group for LGBTQQ identified students and their allies. In order to help facilitate a cultural shift in the wider school community, students involved in the Q/GSA will work with each other to build and enhance their leadership skills to lead school-wide campaigns. By implementing school-wide campaigns, the program will help raise awareness of issues of difference; increase the student body's level of acceptance and ideas surrounding heteronormative culture and its impact on the school environment; and create a more comfortable and safe school environment for LGBTQQ identified people. Gaining the leadership skills necessary to plan and implement these events will help empower Q/GSA students and provide them with skills and opportunities to improve their levels of self-esteem while simultaneously shifting school culture.

EQuALITY will also have a bi-weekly support group for LGBTQQ identified students. Research shows that support groups are one of the most widely identified means of creating safer and more supportive school environments for LGBTQQ students (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006). Support groups are employed to positively

impact levels of self-esteem and affirmation among LGBTQQ folks and can be used as a platform to help these students address social, personal, and familial issues (Uribe, 1994). In particular, research shows that the presence of these groups in school settings lowers rates of victimization and feelings of discrimination (Goodenow et al., 2006). Furthermore, LGBTQQ student participants in research studies reported that support groups are both beneficial and empowering (Uribe, 1994). Both group and individual therapy in afterschool settings are tools that can be utilized by LGBTQQ students who are undergoing the trauma of peer rejection and bullying. In some instances, group therapy can be more advantageous as it provides a sense of normalization, group adherence, a safe space to engage in behavioral exercises and an opportunity for members to learn from each other (Thimm, 2014). Because of the importance of individual and group therapy, EQuALITY will include these vital services for LGBTQQ students as a means of achieving our mission for this particular population.

Program Design

EQuALITY is a triangulated program that promotes change on the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. On the micro level, EQuALITY targets LGBTQQ students and provides them different forms of support. A social work staff member and one clinical social work intern will conduct individual therapy for ten LGBTQQ students. This activity is optional and provided on an as-needed basis for students who wish to engage in individual support. The individual counseling aims to support LGBTQQ students process their experiences and facilitate their journeys of self-empowerment. Individual therapy will be offered by appointment during school hours from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. in the counseling office. On a bi-weekly basis, EQuALITY will host a closed support group for LGBTQQ students in the counseling office's group room. This support group will be open to all LGBTQQ identified students. The group will be conducted throughout the school year on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month. The group will be facilitated by a social worker and meet for one hour at 3:00 p.m. during after school

programming. Through individual therapy and a closed support group, LGBTQQ students will have formal spaces to talk about their individual and shared experiences with each other, which will contribute to a reduction in LGBTQQ students' sense of isolation and an increase in their sense of safety.

On the mezzo level, EQuALITY aims to provide a safe space that connects 25 LGBTQQ students and their allies. This aspect of the program is called Q/GSA. The purpose of Q/GSA is to create a safe social environment, build support for the LGBTQQ community, and help facilitate social change in the school. Q/GSA will meet bi-weekly throughout the school year on the first and third Wednesdays of the month (to prevent conflict with the support group for LGBTQQ students). The group will meet in the classroom of an adult advisor, who is a teacher, who will provide guidance and resources for Q/GSA, from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. during after school programming. The Q/GSA will also be supported by a social work intern whose area of study focuses on macro practice and community change work. Q/GSA will operate through a self-governance structure, where students fill leadership roles. Members of Q/GSA will elect student leaders during the group's third meeting. Some of the activities that Q/GSA will engage in focus on building leadership skills, such as facilitation and mediation, among LGBTQQ students and their allies. Acquiring leadership skills will help empower these students and help them to facilitate social change within the broader school environment.

To help build Q/GSA's leadership capacity via two leadership development workshops, Q/GSA will bring in members of organizing groups such as FIERCE. FIERCE is a non-profit organization that builds leadership and power among LGBTQQ youth of color in New York City to improve individuals and communities by ending oppression. FIERCE leads workshops such as a "Know Your Rights" training, which provides critical knowledge and resources to help empower youth. FIERCE in particular is a good partner organization for EQuALITY. Their members, who are LGBTQQ youth of color, reflect the demographics of the students at the school, specifically those in EQuALITY. These socio-demographic similarities

between FIERCE's participants and members of Q/GSA can serve as inspiration for Q/GSA members to embrace their leadership skills and potential. Students in Q/GSA will also be provided with various educational workshops, such as "Social Justice 101," to expand students' knowledge and familiarity with social justice work. During the first semester, two educational workshops will be conducted by the staff advisor; social work intern; or invited guests, who are activists and organizers for social justice LGBTQQ issues. The latter may include staff and volunteers from organizations, such as the Audre Lorde Project, a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit, Trans and Gender Non Conforming People of Color Centered group that is engaged in community organizing in New York City (Audre Lorde Project [ALP], 2015). During the second semester, students in Q/GSA will work in small groups to research and present on two additional topics of their choice. Members of Q/GSA will be encouraged to collaborate with other student groups, such as the student council and diversity groups, for the research projects and other activities throughout the year. Students in Q/GSA will also have opportunities to bond by engaging in social activities, such as playing games and watching movies. Through its student governance structure, ongoing meetings, and agendas that include educational and leadership development workshops, Q/GSA will act as an established space for LGBTQQ students and their allies to build supportive social connections and empower themselves with the knowledge and skills necessary to help change and shape the school's culture into a more inclusive environment.

Lastly, EQuALITY aims to make macro level changes by increasing acceptance of students' diverse gender and sexual identities within the school. This goal targets the general student population (200 students) and adults within the school, including staff, administration, and faculty. The latter group will go through training on how to be LGBTQQ advocates during the start of the school year. This training will be facilitated by a group, such as Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays of New York City (PFLAG NYC), whose "Safe Schools" program utilizes speakers and trainers in order to address issues around tolerance and acceptance in the school environment.

EQuALITY will partner with organizations to offer trainings that teach faculty and staff about respectful approaches to understanding LGBT issues. These trainings will expand the support network for LGBTQ students by equipping faculty and staff with tools to: (a) become more culturally aware of LGBTQ issues, and (b) advocate for LGBTQ students. Following this training, Q/GSA will implement two social justice workshops for all students in the school—one workshop at the end of each semester to accommodate the capacity of Q/GSA student leaders and have continuous and regular reach with the general student body. Moreover, students in the Q/GSA will organize four school-wide LGBTQ awareness campaigns per year. These may include events such as the “Day of Silence,” to bring attention to the bullying and harassment of LGBTQ identified students.

To further help youth in empowering themselves through program participation, methods of evaluation will be led by youth participants with support from social work staff and master of social work interns. The hybrid model of Participatory Evaluation and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) will be used, depending on the youth members’ interest and capacity to use YPAR for data collection and analysis. According to Powers and Allaman (2012), “YPAR is a tool for increasing youth involvement in social movement organizing that can generate renewed enthusiasm for social change and create new opportunities for youth leadership” (p. 1). Through training and adult mentorship, youth participants become empowered to challenge their intellectual selves. As Powers and Allaman (2012) suggest, “with adult mentorship, youth researchers gain concrete skills and access to networks that can be used to develop power, attain employment, and expand leadership” (p. 2). Furthermore, YPAR promotes positive development by increasing youth participants’ academic achievement and potential for academic success (Wernick, Woodford, & Siden, 2011). Through all of these activities combined on the micro, mezzo, and macro levels, EQuALITY will be able to attain its mission of strengthening social and emotional support for LGBTQ identified students and their allies and building a more inclusive and LGBTQ supportive school envi-

ronment.

Program Components

The following content of this essay describes the various components of EQuALITY in detail. These include an evaluation plan for the program, the staffing plan, the budget and expenses, and potential resources that can help fund EQuALITY. These descriptions are a continuation to the first part of EQuALITY’s program design. They also help reinforce the achievement of EQuALITY’s mission, goals, and objectives.

Evaluation Plan

EQuALITY will employ youth led participatory action research (PAR) as tools for evaluation as these methods strengthen the program’s leadership and empowerment effect on youth participants (Wernick et al., 2011). To measure and evaluate EQuALITY’s expected short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes, the authors will utilize three evaluation methods: surveys, focus groups, and school records. Surveys are great tools that can be produced in various mediums and distributed in many ways to accommodate accessibility issues (Wernick et al., 2013). They are also tools that allow us to have a large reach. Focus groups are an effective way to obtain feedback through natural conversations between stakeholders. Furthermore, through student-led focus groups, youth participants can empower themselves through learning facilitation skills and leading important peer discussions (Wernick, Kulick, & Woodford, 2014). Lastly, school records provide tangible data over time, which helps us measure any change within a timeframe. A description of how the authors will use the evaluation tools is listed below.

Surveys

Middle school students who attend the school and are part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer, and questioning (LGBTQQ) support group and/or Questioning/Gay Straight Alliance (Q/GSA) will administer a modified version of the Neutral Zone’s Riot Youth School Climate Survey (Riot Youth, 2013). This survey was originally distrib-

uted in 2009 in high schools in Ann Arbor, Michigan to determine students' general knowledge about LGBTQ issues and people (Riot Youth, 2009). The modified version will include formatting style and language that is suitable for the cognitive abilities of middle school students. The surveys will be distributed to students, staff, student groups, including Q/GSA, and the wider student body. Surveys will be administered via teacher-led facilitation as well as through use of Survey Monkey in order to facilitate data collection, analysis, follow-ups, and reminders. To determine the school climate surrounding LGBTQ issues, the authors will perform a pre- and post-test model, with the use of both qualitative and quantitative analyses. Measurement of data will be strongly informed by youth participatory action research (YPAR; Powers & Allman, 2012). While the depth of analyses will depend on students' interests and capacity to analyze data, the authors recommend that MSW interns work with the student groups on the survey findings.

As stated above, members of Q/GSA and the LGBTQ support group will administer the surveys to members of Q/GSA, the LGBTQ support group, and other key stakeholders in the school and community, such as other student groups (e.g., diversity groups, student council, etc.) and teachers. Pre-test surveys will be administered and collected in September of the first academic year of programming; intermediate surveys will be collected in June of the first academic year of programming; post-test surveys will be collected 12 months after the completion of the first academic year of programming. A longitudinal, follow-up survey will also be administered 18 months after the completion of the first academic year of programming.

Focus Groups

MSW interns will support facilitation of student led focus groups. Language and terminology for the facilitation will be informed by Riot Youth and the Neutral Zone: Definition of Terms and Resources. Youth facilitators will be encouraged to discuss members' general experiences within Q/GSA and the LGBTQ support group, as well as members' experiences in planning and imple-

menting school-wide awareness campaigns and social justice workshops. In June of the first academic year of programming, members will begin the analysis process by transcribing, coding, and analyzing the data. Facilitators will help youth understand data analysis by training them to collect, analyze, and evaluate data as this process supports empowerment and leadership among youth participants (Wernick et al., 2014). By measuring these outcomes with focus groups, the authors will be able to better understand the effects of EQUALITY on students' leadership development.

School Records

School records and attendance records are also valuable measurement tools. By analyzing school transcripts and attendance records, program staff can measure the relationship between school performance and the number of days that students attend school. School records will also help demonstrate whether LGBTQ students increase, decrease, or maintain their level of engagement with school due to the school's environment.

Staffing

EQUALITY will be staffed by one social worker, one teacher, and two social work interns. The social worker will be the only full-time, paid staff member for the program. This individual will fill the role of Program Coordinator. They must be a licensed master's-level social worker with a Seminar in Field Instruction (SIFI) certificate. The individual in this role will be required to have at least three to five years of experience working with LGBTQ youth of color. They should have at least one year of experience as a supervisor, and a background in program management or administration. In their clinical role, the Program Coordinator will conduct ongoing individual counseling and facilitate a bi-weekly support group for LGBTQ students. They will also supervise two social work interns. In their administrative role, the Program Coordinator will be responsible for overseeing the budget, tracking pertinent data, and reporting to funders.

EQUALITY will also utilize two MSW interns from a local university. Both students will be re-

quired to have prior experience or a demonstrated interest in working with LGBTQQ youth. They will both report directly to the Program Coordinator. One of the interns will be an advanced year student with a clinical concentration. This student will be responsible for conducting ongoing individual counseling and co-facilitating a bi-weekly support group for LGBTQQ students. They will also support the Program Coordinator in administrative tasks, such as collecting data and writing reports to funders. The other intern will be an advanced year student with a concentration in macro practice and community change work. This student will be responsible for supporting Q/GSA and assisting with broader change efforts in the school. Furthermore, this student will help plan and implement educational workshops and support Q/GSA students in developing leadership skills and planning school-wide events. They will also be responsible for conducting outreach to and coordinating with guest speakers and trainers from various community organizations.

Q/GSA will be further supported by a Staff Advisor—a teacher staffed by the Department of Education (DOE). This role will be filled by a teacher who volunteers to provide their time and classroom space to Q/GSA. This individual should have a demonstrated interest in supporting the needs of LGBTQQ youth and their allies. The Staff Advisor will provide guidance and resources to students in Q/GSA, and may be responsible to help plan and implement educational workshops. This individual will work closely with EQUALITY's social work intern.

Personnel Costs: Staff & Honorariums

The largest cost to EQUALITY will be the salary for the Program Coordinator—a non-exempt, full-time-equivalent (FTE) staff member working 37.5 hours a week. This staff person will perform responsibilities across all three projects. Since EQUALITY will staff its programming with two graduate level social work interns and a teacher employed by the school, all personnel costs are associated with the Program Coordinator's position.

Because EQUALITY is a community-based program, the design is heavily focused on collabora-

tive work and utilizing existing resources for program implementation. Q/GSA will provide community-based organizations honorariums as a token of appreciation for their time in providing our students political education and skills training workshops as well as training our school community on how to create a more inclusive environment for LGBTQQ students.

Other Expenses

Certain expenses will be shared across all three projects within EQUALITY. These items include space or rent, utilities, printing, equipment, and maintenance fees. Additional items such as office supplies will vary for each project. With an emphasis on individual and group therapy, the LGBTQQ support group will purchase games that can be used for each approach. Games will help engage middle school aged students in the therapeutic process. The support group will also utilize other art materials, such as crayons, markers, and coloring books for engagement purposes. Q/GSA will use art materials and toys to support group bonding experiences and activities or educational workshops. In addition, school-wide campaigns will use art materials to create poster boards or other creative and symbolic visuals to distribute and put up around the school.

When implementing programming, it is important to provide sustenance for students. Food is necessary to fuel our bodies, minds, and communal spirit, especially after school, when students are juggling between lunch and dinner. Therefore, nutritious snacks will be provided for students in the LGBTQQ support group and at Q/GSA meetings. Furthermore, because Q/GSA is focused on building and strengthening students' leadership, the project will provide financial support for this development process. These expenses include any required transportation for students to attend various trainings or conferences that may be offered within the region. Some conferences and workshops may include registration fees. EQUALITY will allocate funds for students to attend these potential training opportunities in order to develop their leadership skills.

All funders of EQUALITY's programming should be committed to supporting programs for

LGBTQQ youth and youth development. In order to support personnel and programming, funds may be solicited from a number of sources that provide resources for programs that serve youth who identify as LGBTQQ. These funds exist in the form of grants from foundations, government agencies, and philanthropic sources. Additional funds may be garnered through individual donors and student-hosted fundraisers.

Community Outreach Plan

Organizing is no small task, and it involves a myriad of techniques that result in base-building. Community outreach is one modality by which to achieve this. Since the authors already have a teacher to advise EQuALITY, our outreach plan focuses on engaging students through one-on-ones, public announcements, and use of theatre of the oppressed tactics. School social workers will refer students who have expressed interest in the services offered by EQuALITY to program staff. In addition, program staff will talk about EQuALITY at a school staff meeting and work with teachers to identify students who may be interested in social justice work. For confidentiality purposes, program staff will conduct one-on-ones with these students during their advisory period. During these meetings, EQuALITY staff members will introduce students to the purpose and activities of the program, assess their interests, and share meeting times for the support group and Q/GSA. Students may join the program whenever they are ready. These one-on-one efforts are essentially relational meetings (Pyles, 2014, p.100).

Other outreach efforts will occur in public venues within the school. EQuALITY staff will request for and engage in a school assembly where issues of homophobia and bullying are brought to the school's attention through theater of the oppressed, theatrical forms (with audience participation). These scenarios will represent real human dialogues and their alternatives to promote social change (Bhukhanwala, 2014). This assembly will be EQuALITY's first public announcement about its presence at the school and will introduce a potential activity for program participants. To build off the assembly, program staff will schedule presentations and hand out flyers during various

class periods and after school activities. These presentations will help to facilitate conversations about social norms, specifically around heterosexuality and gender identity, and their impact on individuals and culture. EQuALITY will be re-introduced at the end of these presentations, and program staff will offer themselves to students who want to learn more about the program via one-on-ones. Through these various outreach methods, the authors hope that EQuALITY will be able to recruit participants for the program and build a foundation for program participants to build upon in their future work as EQuALITY.

Stakeholders

Stakeholder participation is a vital component of program design, implementation, and evaluation. Thus, ideally, EQuALITY would strive to engage stakeholders in each of these aspects of program development. In order to create a program that truly meets the realities of the lived experiences of a given community, it is crucial to involve that community in the planning process (Lewis, Packard, & Lewis, 2012). Though there are many stakeholders associated with this program, the target population of EQuALITY is students. Therefore, it is of central importance that these students are engaged as vital stakeholders throughout the process.

Because students are the main stakeholders of EQuALITY, it is important to give students a voice in the design of the program by conducting a needs-assessment. This assessment will include input from adult informants, such as teachers and school administrators, to get their perspective on the needs for programming at the school. The process of a needs-assessment will ensure that the actual needs of the community are prioritized, rather than limiting it to the outside perspective of the current program planners. However, an important existing aspect of EQuALITY's program design is a pre-test/post-test model. The use of a pre-test will help stakeholders recognize and connect with the particular needs for this program (Lewis et al., 2012). An additional stakeholder to consider during the design phase is the funder. Funding sources can exercise a great deal of influence over a program's structure. Thus, it will be important

for EQuALITY to seek funders that align themselves with the mission (Lewis et al., 2012). This will be accomplished by primarily focusing on finding sources that specifically support LGBTQ youth programming and development.

During the implementation phase, it is important to engage a variety of stakeholders including students, parents, EQuALITY staff members, teachers, administrators, community organizations, and funders. In order to help facilitate the process of stakeholder engagement, EQuALITY will distribute a bi-monthly e-newsletter. This newsletter will keep stakeholders informed of and interested in programmatic updates and accomplishments. In order to foster the important connection with the larger sociopolitical environment, these newsletters may include current events relevant to the mission of EQuALITY (Lewis et al., 2012). To help promote a collaborative relationship with existing service providers, these newsletters may also highlight relevant successes of community partners or promote community events. Involvement of and feedback from the school administrators will continue to be important, as the program could not exist without their support. The EQuALITY staff will maintain regular communication with the administration and hold a monthly meeting with both teachers and administrators in order to work collaboratively with these stakeholders on the program's progress.

As in the design phase, students in EQuALITY will be highly involved in the evaluation phase through the utilization of YPAR. The results of the students' data and findings will be published at the end of the school year in the form of an annual report. EQuALITY will provide students, parents, teachers, and community organizations access to an executive summary. A full report of the evaluation will be provided to both school-based and district wide administrators, as well as funders. These stakeholders will then play a vital role in the directing the future of the program.

Leadership Characteristics

A position of leadership holds a great amount of power and responsibility. Because leaders are equipped with such power, it is important for people holding positions of leadership in EQuALITY

to be ethical in practice, have good knowledge about their professional responsibilities, and show the motivation to work towards the proposed goal. Having a multicultural awareness and a commitment to creating a space free from judgment and racial prejudice, which can often persist within the workplace, are essential for leadership in EQuALITY. Furthermore, leadership within EQuALITY requires the knowledge, awareness, and understanding to work across a lens of multiculturalism. Culturally diverse teams that are comprised of individuals of different races, sexual and gender identities, and socio-economic backgrounds can bring essential, creative perspectives to programs and projects. Racial and cultural stereotypes that exist within working environments can interfere with productivity by creating conflict. In turn, the unresolved conflict can negatively affect performance. Thus, it is important that leaders of EQuALITY be committed to moderating power imbalances due to societal forces and creating a safe working environment for people of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage (Ely, Padavic, & Thomas, 2012).

Leadership in EQuALITY also requires the ability to be forward thinking and make fair decisions based on group input and long-term organizational goals. A good leader must have patience for team members' learning styles and capabilities, assessment skills to measure work efficiency, passion for the mission and vision of EQuALITY and a commitment to the guidelines of EQuALITY. Leadership in EQuALITY requires clear knowledge of mission, vision, and purpose. Leadership also requires the ability and interest to collaborate with other organizations. This is especially important for the school-wide awareness campaigns. Passion for the work is also paramount for leadership in EQuALITY. It is necessary that the leaders have a clear vision, are aware of current organizational structure, and have the capacity, knowledge, and decision-making skills to form a connection between the organization's current model of functioning and desired goals for the future (Schissler Manning, 2003)

All members of the leadership team in EQuALITY (i.e., the staff advisor, social worker, social work interns, and students) must lead with ethical practice that guides the organization toward

achieving the desired goals. The social worker and staff advisor will use authoritative power to delegate tasks to appropriate team members, namely the social work interns, teachers, and students, in a way that is assertive, but not overbearing. Furthermore, the social worker, staff advisor, and social work interns of EQUALITY will need to have excellent team building and communication skills, and the social worker will hold clinical licensure to ensure professional and effective clinical practice. Additionally, the social work leader and staff advisor will be creative and understand how to carry out YPAR effectively. All leaders of EQUALITY, the staff advisor, social worker, social work interns, and students will be positive, motivational, communicative, inspirational, and dependable (Goleman, 2015).

Discussion

According to the National Association of Social Worker's (NASW) Code of Ethics (2008), it is a social worker's ethical responsibility to empower and attend to the needs of those who are vulnerable and oppressed. In schools throughout the United States, LGBTQ youth are subjected to bullying and harassment. EQUALITY seeks to empower LGBTQ identified youth and their allies by building their leadership capacity and involving them in all steps of program development and implementation. Student involvement is important to the structure of EQUALITY, as it is through partnership between the students and staff members that important ethical issues can be discussed freely in a safe space. Participation in this process offers students the opportunity to become champions of their own needs and rights. This process teaches students valuable leadership and advocacy skills, which in turn increases their level of self-worth and confidence. Furthermore, it encourages these students to promote social justice for themselves and others in order to create widespread community change.

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