

San Mateo PRIDE Health Equity Initiative: Building Outreach
Allyson Lent
CSIP Intern

What did I do?

This year I worked as an intern with the PRIDE Initiative focusing on building outreach. In an effort to get a clearer picture of who comprises the LGBTQ population of San Mateo County as well as gain a better sense of what obstacles exist for the LGBTQ population, I met with most of the other Health Equity Initiatives (HEIs) to facilitate a conversation about the issues faced by the LGBTQ sub-populations of their respective communities (i.e. the LGBTQ Pacific Islanders). Grounded in the ethics of cultural humility and intersectionality, I sought to listen deeply and ask follow-up questions that could expose areas for further growth and exploration for the PRIDE Initiative, but also for the other HEIs, recognizing that the issues faced by the overall LGBTQ population overlaps with the issues faced by many other marginalized populations. The guiding questions for the conversations were as follows:

- What are the best ways for the PRIDE Initiative to outreach to the LGBTQ members of your community?
- What may be some of the obstacles to reaching the LGBTQ members of your community?
- What are your suggestions to address some of these obstacles?

How did it go?

I was greeted very warmly by all the HEIs. They were welcoming and invited me to join their meetings and set aside time in the agenda for this conversation. I very much felt a friendly spirit of collaboration insofar as how I was welcomed into these spaces. Many of the HEIs

agreed that this should be a conversation starter, and that discussing this for 15 minutes was not entirely sufficient. In this regard, it seems very hopeful that there is plenty of energy to explore this topic and brainstorm together ways to better reach and serve the community.

Furthermore, many HEIs have continued to follow up with me and be interested in what I found in my conversations with other HEIs. Members and co-chairs have continued to let me know of more events and people in the community who they think would be beneficial to partner with and/or to whom we could go for more information.

However, at times the conversation felt very difficult, either for me or for the HEIs or for both. I think this stems from the fact that we were trying to talk about a serious topic, LGBTQ discrimination, and one that hits these communities in hard and myriad ways. To have these conversations with a stranger who was just visiting the HEI is not easy, and though I still think a lot of valuable information was gained from these discussions, more could be gleaned if a deeper relationship built on trust could be established.

Overall, I was really impressed at the willingness of the HEIs to participate in this project, to give me time during their monthly meeting, and to continue to be interested in the project, as well as continuing to send along info on events and contacts in the community. I hope that more counties follow in San Mateo's footsteps and build their own system of HEIs.

Findings

The two themes that emerged in just about every one of my meetings with the various HEIs were the need for collaboration between HEIs and the role that stigma plays in the LGBTQ community at large and also in the communities explored in this project.

Many HEIs suggested that PRIDE partner with other HEIs either on specific projects or

events, or that work needs to be done on how to include other HEIs in events hosted by one or more HEIs. We were able to discuss a lot during the 15 or so minutes that we had these conversations, but it became very clear that more time is needed to have these conversations more fully in order to more constructively brainstorm together.

Stigma, in its myriad forms, was the other very present theme throughout all the discussions. For more on this, please see the attached powerpoint presentation that includes specifics as to some of the various ways that stigma against LGBTQ people plays out in the HEI communities.

Recommendations for PRIDE

Now that we know some of the ways that stigma impacts our community, the hard work comes in brainstorming ways to address it in order to encourage and increase outreach. Here are some possibilities:

- Create a QTPOC (Queer, Trans, Person of Color) working group within PRIDE which would necessitate a priority given to focusing on this issue in particular.
- Workshops addressing intersectionality, potentially partnering with another HEI to foster the collaborative spirit that seems to be in waiting among many Initiatives.
- Cultural Humility training for PRIDE members to increase PRIDE members capacity to continue this work.

Recommendations for BHRS

Because so many Initiatives showed interest in building partnerships and fostering collaboration among Initiatives, I think it would make sense for BHRS to think about ways to help facilitate this process. Two ideas are to form yearly partnerships between two Initiatives,

perhaps agreeing to host a joint event or project, or to have some CSIP interns serve as the bridge between two Initiatives, with their project having a specific focus on intersectionality.

Thanks

I have really enjoyed having the opportunity to work with the PRIDE Initiative this year. I learned a lot while I was visiting with the Initiatives this year! The members of the PRIDE Initiative are wonderful, and I am sad to be leaving. And a special shout out with thanks to Katy and Lauren for their support, encouragement, and leadership this year!