

Rhode Island Higher Education Suicide Prevention Advisory Group

Quarterly Meeting –April 26th, 2018

Community College of Rhode Island, Room 1040

3:00-4:30 PM

- Welcome and Introductions
 - Lee Peebles, New England Institute of Technology
 - Kyle Gamache, Community College of Rhode Island
 - Carolyn DiDonato, The Kent Center/New England Institute of Technology
 - Lauren Fiske, Rhode Island School of Design
 - Kristen Buglione, Johnston & Wales University
 - Robert Richards, Bryant University
 - Christopher Bailey, Roger Williams University
 - Cheryl Granai, Providence College
 - Erin Lane-Aaronian, Brown University
 - Jorge Vargas, Brown University
 - Travis Vendetti, Rhode Island Department of Health
 - Elana Rosenberg, Youth Pride Rhode Island

- Rhode Island “Suicide Proof” Website
 - Travis Vendetti (RIDOH) opened the meeting by slightly re-arranging the agenda to speak about RIDOH’s “Suicide Proof” website first, as the Youth Pride representative was running late to the meeting.
 - Travis explained that the “Suicide Proof” website (www.suicideproof.org) was designed by RIDOH staff in partnership with the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence several years ago and now the Violence & Injury Prevention Program is seeking to update/upgrade the website.
 - The Department is seeking volunteers from this group who might be willing to approach the web development/computer science departments at their institution to consider updating the website as part of a student project/initiative.
 - If any member is willing to take on this task, please contact Travis at travis.vendetti@health.ri.gov so he can help you in approaching the appropriate staff at your organization.
 - Lauren Fiske of RISD offered to possibly collaborate with other institution as part of a “hack-a-thon” event, which RISD has held in the past. These type of events convene students in relevant disciplines from several schools to come together and make a product in a relatively short amount of time.
 - Travis then solicited group for feedback and possible improvements to the current website that could be incorporated into the updates. Feedback and comments received included:
 - Considering changing the name from “Suicide Proof”. Members noted that in reality it is very difficult to ever make a physical space completely “suicide proof” and therefore it may be misleading to someone caring for a suicidal individual who thinks they have eliminated all sources of lethal means.
 - Changing the structure of the website to look at different spaces than just traditional homes, such as dorm rooms at colleges. That way a visitor to the site could learn about hazards/risks in different environments. For example by showing part of a college campus the website could highlight the risk posed by roof access and suggest that staff ensure access points are secured/locked.
 - Include protective factors and highlight people or resources within buildings that could help alleviate the risk of suicide. For instance, if showing a college campus

highlight the counseling center, if showing a community a church/center of faith could be highlighted as a possible place for individuals to seek out assistance.

- Youth Pride Rhode Island
 - Elana Rosenberg, Executive Director of Youth Pride Rhode Island spoke to the group about the Youth Pride organization and outlined all of the various services/programs offered by the group. These include but are not limited to:
 - Providing a safe space for LGBTQ youth ages 13 to 24 several times throughout the week. Different age groups are allotted different days/times. Some parental consent is required for those below the age of 18 for certain activities (car transport, etc.) but for the most part the Youth Pride center is open to all to come in.
 - Providing clothing, food, and toiletries for LGBTQ youth who may be experiencing homelessness.
 - Providing counseling services on-site with a master's level clinician two times per week, with additional support from master's of social work students as they are available.
 - Offering peer to peer support groups known as "The Way Out" for all ages 13-24.
 - Crisis intervention and case management services from Youth Pride staff.
 - Providing a time period for youth aged 9-13 once per week in their drop-in center, where they can connect with other youth their age and take advantage of a support group facilitated by a mental health clinician. (Youth are required to have parental consent and guardians can stay at the drop-in center during the session)
 - Provide professional development for service providers and educators of all levels, including higher education. This includes education on proper language use and how educators can make students of a sexual or gender minority feel welcome in their classrooms.
 - Hosting several other activities including things like a family dinner on Wednesday nights and Zumba/Yoga classes
 - Youth Pride also works to provide advocacy and leadership on LGBTQ issues throughout Rhode Island.
 - For more information about the services they provide and possible collaboration opportunities, please contact Elana directly at elana@youthprideri.org
 - After reviewing the extensive services Youth Pride RI offers and ensuring that all members know about the specific services they may want to take advantage of (especially professional development training), the group moved to a discussion format on what each campus is doing to support this vulnerable population.
 - Travis (RIDOH) opened up the discussion by saying the recent Youth Risk Behavior survey results confirm that those of a sexual or gender minority suffer disproportionate risk of poor mental health status and suicidal ideation.
 - Lauren Fiske from RISD reported that while their institution does not currently have an active LGBTQ student group, they do provide non-gendered housing options, and encourage students to take advantage of gender identity support groups at Brown University (who allow RISD students to join).
 - Cheryl Granai of Providence College reported they have an active student-run support/advocacy group on campus that previously enjoyed a close relationship with Youth Pride RI. The group is entitled SHEPARD, which stands for Stopping Homophobia, Eliminating Prejudice, and Restoring Dignity also commemorates Matthew Shepard (a college student who was the victim of a LGBT hate crime). They hold events throughout the school year to help bring awareness of issues faced by LGBTQ individuals to their campus.

- Robert Richards of Bryant University stated that while there is no specific LGBTQ support groups on their campus, this is more reflective of the lack of engagement from students in any of these types of groups. However, Bryan does have an active PRIDE chapter who has held recent events and recently hired a part-time PRIDE Coordinator as part of their administrative staff.
 - Robert also reported that while there has been advocacy and a push for gender-neutral restroom on their campus, pushback from some conservative elements have stalled these efforts. There is non-gendered housing available for students who prefer it.
- Christopher Bailey of Roger Williams University reported that their organization provides several “Safe Zones” on campus (with trained staff, see note below), has an LGBTQ support group, a designated LGBTQ coordinator, and ample gender-neutral restrooms available for students.

*Note in regard to “Safe Zones”: Elana Rosenberg noted while it is great for organizations to have these spaces for students, it is key to ensure that the staff in these spaces are trained and able to accommodate students of a sexual or gender minority. Past person experience has shown Elana that sometimes a space will be designated without training the staff member in it, which can lead to negative experiences for those seeking help

- Kristen Buglione of Johnston & Wales University stated that they do have a student-led LGBTQ organization but have struggled with establishing counseling groups for this population. There is good support for gender-neutral restrooms and using preferred pro-nouns but they do struggle with training faculty and then losing those who are trained to normal turnover.
 - As one of the biggest barriers Kristen has encountered with training faculty is simply getting them into the room, she asked the group if there were any online trainings they could recommend?
 - Cheryl (Providence College) noted that there is a Kognito training specifically on LGBTQ topics.
 - Elana (Youth Pride) commented that while an online training can be good to start a conversation, the most important breakthroughs tend to happen in the in-person trainings where personal experiences can be shared. Elana also noted that while only a few faculty may show up to in-person trainings, their effect on a campus is multiplied by their interactions with colleagues and other professional staff.
- Lee Peebles of the New England Institute of Technology reported that their organization was able to benefit from “starting from scratch” when building their new residence facilities and gender-neutral restrooms are very prevalent. NEIT also has LGBTQ student support groups available on campus as well.
- Paula Staples and Kyle Gamache of the Community College of Rhode Island reported that they do have gender-neutral restrooms available on all of their campuses, they have an Office of Gender Training that interacts regularly with staff/students, and have a chapter of the Triangle Alliance (an open student-run group for LGBTQ students) that is based on their Lincoln Campus. They did share that they wish the Triangle Alliance could be spread to all three campuses to be more convenient to the entire student body.
- Erin Lane-Aaronian and Jorge Vargas of Brown University reported that they have several support groups for this population, including a gender identity group which has been meeting for 2 years, an “LGBTQ Trauma” group, and a group that is specific to those who are both a racial and gender/sexual minority. They also have safe zones with trained staff available for students and have wide

acceptance for LGBTQ friendly initiatives from staff and faculty. They did report some difficulty with the health services around questions of gender.

- Travis opened up to the group to see if any other institutions have encountered difficulty with health services on campus around gender identity.
 - No specific instances were offered however some members did note there are new Electronic Health Records that examine each body part separately to help avoid categorizing an entire person as a specific gender.
 - Elana (Youth Pride) also pointed to Thundermist Community Health Center as valuable resource for health services staff who are seeking to become more inclusive when providing services to students. Elana or Travis (RIDOH) are happy to connect health services staff to Thundermist to learn more.
- Elana (Youth Pride) then commented that while it is great to have resources on campus, learning to function in a society that is not always friend/welcoming is a key to LGBTQ individuals being able to advocate for themselves and obtain the services they need.
 - Also, Elana stated that it would be extremely useful for a list of “LGBTQ friendly” services off campus to be created and distributed to the various on-campus support programs. Then, if a individual needs to go off-campus to obtain a service they will know what organizations have been vetted before-hand.
 - This may be something the group wants to consider creating in the future.
- The National College Health Assessment
 - Travis (RIDOH) opened this segment of the meeting by asking if any of the colleges/universities present for the meeting had implemented the National College Health Assessment (NCHA) on their campuses as talks are currently underway to implement this survey (or a similar one) at RIC, CCRI, and URI.
 - Kristen Buglione reported that Johnston & Wales University began implementation of the NCHA several years ago and will be continuing the survey going forward.
 - Johnston & Wales has found the survey very helpful in setting priorities around student health and have been able to benchmark several indicators over the years the survey has been distributed.
 - The biggest challenge to completing the survey is getting participation from students, which requires sustained outreach efforts in order to obtain a sufficient sample size.
 - Lauren Fiske reported that the RI School of Design had implemented the Jed Campus “Healthy Minds” survey and found it useful in surveying students on mental health.
 - Lauren will reach out to Shauna to get an estimate on the cost of this survey and provide it to the group.