Reducing Housing Inequities for LGBTQ+ Communities: Building Your Allyship Toolbox

Shannon Fowler & Courtney Waters
University of Arizona, Southwest Institute for Research on Women
26th Annual Arizona Housing Coalition Conference
October 30, 2019
The Lighthouse Project

The purpose of the Lighthouse Project is to provide LGBTQ+ affirming and trauma supportive services for young adults, 18+, experiencing housing instability.
Outline for this session

Part I: Housing inequities for LGBTQ+ people

Part II: Building your allyship toolbox
Part I: Housing inequities for LGBTQ+ people
Statistical Inequality

20-40% of youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ while 7-10% of the population identify as such.

(Choi, Wilson, Shelton, & Gates, 2015)
Reasons for Inequality

- Lower income for transgender and gender expansive individuals
- Higher rate of being in a juvenile detention facility
- Difficulty finding accepting shelters
- Higher rate of LGBTQ+ individuals touching the welfare system
- High rate of violence in homes and dating violence
United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Rule Progression
Equal Access to Housing Final Rule

2012

Housing shall be made available without regard to actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status.
Included a definition for sexual orientation and gender identity, and expanded the definition of family in most of HUD's programs

2016

Requires a recipient, subrecipient, or provider to establish, amend, or maintain program admissions, occupancy, and operating policies and procedures so that equal access is provided to individuals based on their gender identity
Amends HUD’s definition of “gender identity” to more clearly reflect the difference between actual and perceived gender identity.
Provides that grant recipients, subrecipients, owners, operators, managers, and providers (Shelter Providers) under HUD programs which permit single-sex or sex-segregated facilities may establish a policy, consistent with state and local law, by which such Shelter Provider considers an individual’s sex for the purposes of determining accommodation within such shelters and for purposes of determining sex for admission to any facility or portion thereof.
Outcomes

Weaken the protections for homeless transgender individuals afforded under Equal Access Rule
-Washington Post 5.22.2019

Potential that transgender individuals will not be housed based on their gender identity

Could create greater number of transgender individuals sleeping on the streets
HUD Equal Access Toolkit

HUD deleted the link to the Equal Access Toolkit

Status of the 2019 Proposed Rule

On October 29th, witnesses testified about the impacts of the rule to the House Financial Services Committee’s Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations.

Much discussion around the HUD Secretary’s negative statements about transgender women.

Discussion around the inequality that already exists and that this rule would make it worse.
LGBTQ+ homelessness focus group results
What do you want people to know about homeless LGBTQ+ folks?
Safety is an issue

“Depending on your level of passing, that is where your level of safety comes from. If you can pass as a man or as a straight person, as a cis person, then you’re safe. But if there’s a tiny bit of doubt, you can get attacked. Especially if you’re a trans person of color, or a person of color in general. Being a person of color and queerness is on a whole other level.”
"A year ago when I went for housing, I passed so well, they didn’t anticipate issues around that. But I don’t want to have to say, “oh hey I’m trans.” They were like, oh you’ll be with the other guys. Then there’s a transphobic guy and it becomes a problem. If people aren’t asking questions about identities, they might be making assumptions and then putting you in unsafe positions. So then you have to out yourself."

"We have to out ourselves. For one, if there’s programming specifically for your identity, then you have to let them know so you can access it."
What needs are not being met?
Creating and maintaining safe boundaries

“Another side specifically for queer people, creating camps at home once you get housing and not breaking the cycle. We need resources for other people. We need to learn how to create boundaries. Let me open my doors to share resources that others aren’t getting yet, even when it’s not the wisest or safety choice, or it’s against the housing rules.”
Gender-inclusive housing

“It cannot be said enough, gender-inclusive housing! Making sure management is safe and understanding. For example, if you have a neighbor whose super homophobic, you need to be able to call your landlord.”
Sensitivity training for housing providers

“The executive might have the training but not the secretary, and she’s the one we talk to!”

“We need affirming services but not like, ‘This is a whole different group, make sure you’re okay with them.’”
Incomprehensive resource lists that are not LGBTQ-inclusive

Asking folks to compromise their identities in order to get help

Outing them

Sending folks to places that aren’t safe

Making assumptions

What are non-helpful things people do to “help” LGBTQ+ folks?
What are helpful things people can do for LGBTQ+ folks?

- Community-building opportunities
- Advocates to accompany to services
- Mentorship
- Staff development trainings
Part II: Building your allyship toolbox
What is an ally?
1. Define what it means to be an ally
2. List things that strong allies do
What is an ally?

A person who is a member of the dominant or majority group who works to end oppression in their personal and professional life through support of, as an advocate for, the oppressed population.

A person who wants to fight for the equality of a marginalized group they’re not a part of. **Therefore, everyone has the potential to be an ally!**
5 TIPS FOR BEING AN ALLY
1. UNDERSTAND YOUR PRIVILEGE

Know that there are some things that you'll never experience of have to think about.

WHAT IS MY PRIVILEGE?

2. LISTEN

Listen to what marginalized groups are saying. Educate yourself and become a better ally.

3. SPEAK UP, NOT OVER

Use your privilege to support others, but make sure to do it in a way that doesn't talk over those you are trying to support.

4. MISTAKES HAPPEN

Sometimes you fuck up. Apologize when you do, and make it a learning experience for next time.

SOMETIMES YOU F**K UP. APOLOGIZE WHEN YOU DO, AND MAKE IT A LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR NEXT TIME.

SORRY

IT'S GOOD
Being an ally isn't just an identity, it's something that you have to actively work at.
Understanding your privilege
Institutional Level Allyship
Physical Space

- All gender restrooms
- LGBTQ+ imagery and representation
- Safe zone signage
- Safe and welcoming space indicators
Organizational Culture

- Incorporating pronouns
- Using gender-neutral language
- Hiring a diverse staff, including LGBTQ+-identified people
Organizational Policies

Non-discrimination policies

LGBTQ+ competency and allyship training

Affirming healthcare services

Intake forms and documentation
Community Presence

Form an LGBTQ+ advisory board
Participate in LGBTQ+ events
Personal Level Allyship
Pronouns

Do not make assumptions

Ask respectfully

Mirror Language

Language and terms are always evolving

Using the wrong pronoun is misgendering someone

Respond if you misgender
Put Forth the Effort

normalize gender identity, sexual orientation, and expression

explore opportunities to expand affirming experiences

Know resources

seek out educators if you have questions and avoid asking questions out of curiosity

don’t invalidate experience based on age

be aware of your own impulses and reactions
Micro-Aggressions
Come up with 1-3 ally practices that you can put into action today and get into small groups and discuss your practices with each other
Shannon Fowler, J.D., LL.M.
shannonnfowler@email.arizona.edu

Courtney Waters, MPH, MS, CHES
cwaters2@email.arizona.edu