



OUT Maine's mission is to work towards a welcoming and affirming Maine for our rural youth of non-confirming sexual orientation, gender expression and gender identity through support, education and empowerment of these youth, their allies and families.

Maine's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth (LGBTQ) youth are at very high risk. The statistics for these Maine youth are harsh:

- 9 out of 10 are bullied regularly in schools¹
- 3X to 4X the suicide rate of heterosexual peers²
- 3X as likely to feel sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in the past year³
- 25-40% of Maine homeless teens are LGBTQ⁴
- More than doubly likely to experience domestic violence in the home⁵
- High risk of substance abuse (twice the usage rate of heterosexual teens of heroin, cocaine and inhalants)⁶
- More than 3X the rate of forced sexual contact than heterosexual students⁷

Given these realities, OUT Maine has identified the key risk factors affecting these youth, in an effort to craft an intervention strategy likely to have the most effective impact.

Isolation. For Maine's rural youth, the lack of public transportation has a double-barreled negative effect: youth cannot get to places that feel safer to them and as a result, have limited resources to get out of unsafe places such as schools and homes.

Poor mental health services. Recent research in the midcoast area has shown that the mental health resources for youth in general are not sufficient (Midcoast District Coordinating Council survey, 2017). The lack of LGBTQ cultural competency in mental health services often results in feeling unsafe with therapists, as well as confidentiality challenges that keep youth from accessing available services.

Poor to no homeless youth services that are LGBTQ culturally competent. There are only three programs in Maine that provide shelter and case management to LGBTQ

¹ GLSEN National School Climate Survey, 2017.

² Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 2017

³ Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 2017

⁴ Human Rights Campaign. www.hrc.org

⁵ Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 2017

⁶ Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 2017

⁷ Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 2017

homeless youth – in Portland, Lewiston-Auburn and Bangor. The rest of Maine’s homeless LGBTQ youth have no services available and too often end up couch-surfing.⁸

Substance abuse services that are challenged by the lack of LGBTQ cultural competency. Existing prevention programs are challenged by LGBTQ youth, as evidenced by the MIHYS data revealing particularly high usage rates in the LGBTQ youth population. LGB students were twice as likely to report smoking cigarettes in the last 30 days; 29% LGB students, compared to 19% heterosexual, reported using marijuana in the last 30 days; and LGB students were twice as likely to have used heroin, cocaine and inhalants compared to their heterosexual peers.⁹ Services must develop cultural-competency for working with LGBTQ youth in order to develop the trusting relationships that are essential to behavior change.

Lack of support and safety in the home. Fully one-third of LGBTQ youth in Maine report that they do not receive love and support in their homes, while less than half (43%) feel that their parents are good at talking to them. Lesbian and gay youth reported at twice the level for violence in their home or the threat made them consider leaving home (38%), while bisexual youth had a 43% rate of violence in the home compared to the 18% of heterosexual youth.¹⁰

LGBT young adults who reported high levels of family rejection during adolescence are:

- 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide
- 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression
- 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs, and
- 3.4 times more likely to report having engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse.

compared with peers from families that reported no or low levels of family rejection.¹¹

Family acceptance helps:

- protect against depression, suicidal behavior, and substance abuse
- promote self-esteem, social support, and overall health.¹²

Unsafe schools. Only 9% of LGBTQ youth attended a school with a comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policy that included specific protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Only 1 in 4 youth were taught positive things about LGBT people in class. Over 80% reported negative language and remarks about their sexual orientation or gender expression. Over half of transgender students reported not being

⁸ Bradley, Jon and Thomas McLaughlin. Conducting an Accurate Count of Rural Homeless Youth: Implications for Policy, Practice and Lessons Learned,” 2015.

⁹ Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 2017

¹⁰ Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 2017

¹¹ Ryan, C. (2009). *Supportive families, healthy children: Helping families with lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender children*. San Francisco, CA: Family Acceptance Project, Marian Wright Edelman Institute, San Francisco State University.

¹² Ryan, C. (2010). Engaging families to support lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth: The Family Acceptance Project. *The Prevention Researcher*, 17(4), 11- 13.

allowed to use the restroom that aligned with their gender, despite state guidelines directing gender-aligning restroom use.¹³

Thanks to a longitudinal study from British Columbia, we know that the creation of school clubs called Gay/Straight/Trans Alliances reduces bullying and harassment for ALL students by 50%, greatly improving school climate.¹⁴

OUT Maine's Intervention Model

Given these statistics, the risk factors identified and the research about approaches to effect positive change, OUT Maine has piloted and refined a four-pronged intervention model that addresses the unique challenges of rural communities in creating a welcoming and affirming environment.

Creating Safe Spaces in Communities

Through our Youth Policy Board that works on social justice issues, our statewide Rainbow Ball Weekend that draws 150-200 youth from around the state, our weekly drop-in program in Rockland, numerous overnight programs during the year around the state, weekend retreats at Camp Kieve-Wavus in Nobleboro and our most recent LGBTQ+ Youth Craft Studio Immersion Weekend at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, OUT Maine provides multiple opportunities for youth to come together and connect with trained adult leaders and mentors. Youth need adult LGBT role models, as well as opportunities to ask the questions they cannot ask at home or in school about their rights, their sexual health, healthy relationships and self-care. Relationships are built at these events that span across the year through internet connections and both adult and peer-to-peer support.

Building Safe Schools

For rural Maine youth, schools are the place they spent the most out-of-home time, with many riding the bus to school and home each day. Making schools safe is a critical element of OUT Maine's work. As a result of the British Columbia study, which showed that the existence of Gay/Straight/Trans Alliances (GSTAs) in schools reduce bullying and harassment for ALL students by 50%, OUT Maine has prioritized improving the school climate for LGBTQ+ youth.

There are 106 GSTAs in existence throughout Maine, which is only about 60% of public secondary schools. Although we work with many of them, there is so much yet to be done to strengthen existing clubs' capacity as well as reach the other almost 70 public schools that need this resource. We will continue to support these GSTAs in their development, as well as expand the number of schools with GSTAs over the coming years.

¹³ GLSEN National School Climate Survey, 2017.

¹⁴ <http://news.ubc.ca/2014/01/20/gay-straight-alliances-in-schools-reduce-suicide-risk-for-all-students/>

In addition, we have developed a school staff training that provides basic LGBTQ youth cultural competency around terminology, sexual orientation vs. gender identity and expression, risk and protective factors and how to make schools safer.

Weaving a Rural Provider Safety Net

Unfortunately, even with these efforts, many LGBTQ youth may be unable to participate in our programming due to lack of transportation, fear, shame or the harassment they experience. Thus, building an informed and supportive provider safety net is absolutely essential to reaching Maine's rural LGBTQ. Apparently, this prong of OUT's work is a unique approach in the country.

LGBTQ youth come into contact with front-line providers such as health care providers, mental health providers, substance abuse programs staff, educators, clergy and youth service agencies, on a regular basis. In a survey done by the True Colors Fund, 99% of service providers reported that they serve LGBTQ youth.

Yet LGBTQ youth routinely receive services from providers who do not have LGBTQ-specific knowledge. All providers must have the basic information, resources, and referral sources such as OUT Maine to adequately support these LGBTQ youth in their practices – ensuring that the care these youth receive is appropriate to their need and that the youth feel heard and supported by their care providers. These provider relationships may be the one key adult connection that can make a difference, given the paucity of safe space programming in rural Maine. We must bridge the challenge of isolation and lack of access to local LGBTQ youth-friendly programming by creating safe spaces within provider-youth relationships.

Since 2015, OUT Maine has trained over 7000 providers around the state in the risks and protective factors of LGBTQ youth and how to improve the climate in offices, schools and practices. We hope to continue to expand this safety net of providers around Maine.

Supporting Parents and Families to Reduce LGBTQ Youth Homelessness

The numbers of calls to the office from parents and families of LGBTQ+ youth, seeking information and support, continue to rise. Parent and family challenges include conflicts between parents and within families about their youth, religious denigration of homosexuality, lack of information about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues, terminology and youth needs for acceptance and support.

OUT Maine has a monthly parent/family information and support night, to help parents get the information they need, as well as develop a support network to provide context and peer-to-peer assistance. We are exploring how to expand this resource virtually, to reach parents and families throughout Maine. Helping parents to build their own support networks will go a long way toward keeping LGBTQ youth safe in their homes.

OUT Maine is a leader in the state in working to create a brighter future for our LGBTQ youth. We hope you will join us in our efforts to change lives! 6/19

