



Webinar: Understanding and Serving LGBTQ+ Refugee and Newcomer Clients

May 30, 2024, 2:00 – 3:30 PM ET

Transcript

Introduction

Maya Wahrman: Hi, everyone. Welcome. My name is Maya Wahrman. I'm the Switchboard Training Officer in Client-Centered Services. I'm so excited to kick off a series of trainings and deliverables we're going to be having here at Switchboard this summer starting with Pride Month, as Pride Month starts this Saturday, regarding understanding and serving LGBTQ+ refugee and newcomer clients. So, we are really excited to have you all here. We have a lot of content to cover today, so we're going to jump right in.

Today's Facilitator

MW: You may have seen me on other Switchboard trainings, but I am a licensed social worker in the State of New Jersey. I worked in the field for many years in refugee resettlement case management, medical case management, school impact. I've also worked on the refugee health grant for the state of New Jersey. And I've been at Switchboard for a year.

MW: I'm particularly excited about what we're calling the Pride Suite, these webinars and tools that we're doing to support LGBTQ+ refugees and newcomers. My first social cause before I even knew what refugee resettlement was, was being the president of my gay-straight alliance at my high school and supporting my local LGBTQ community where I grew up in Bloomington, Indiana. So to be able to merge these two social causes has been such a privilege professionally. I also helped serve at the agency where I used to work our first transgender client and think about how to make our policies more inclusive to that client and all the other LGBTQ clients and staff who came after them.

MW: So we're going to get started here. You saw all of the instructions at the beginning. You can use the Q&A function to ask us any questions, but we have a lot to cover.

Learning Objectives

MW: By the end of the session, you'll be able to define LGBTQ+ as a term, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression within diverse newcomer cultures and contexts. So you'll be able to summarize some of the unique challenges and nuances LGBTQ+ refugees and newcomers experience in their resettlement to the U.S., and you'll be able to identify considerations, important considerations and skills in serving and advocating for LGBTQ+ newcomer clients.



1. Defining LGBTQ+ and Key Terms

MW: So we have a lot of terms to start with in defining LGBTQ+ and other key terms. But as we get into these definitions, we know that this content is new for a lot of folks here. We're really excited to be learning alongside you. This is an important topic. It can also be a sensitive topic. It can generate a lot of feelings and emotions from all kinds of walks of life.

Ground Rules

MW: So I want to go to our ground rules. Again, you are not going to be able to engage live, but to think about as you're processing this content. In general, we want to remember why we are in resettlement: to serve all refugees equitably and respectfully. So we're here to serve all refugees equitably and respectfully, and that includes LGBTQ clients. So that's why we're here today to learn how to do that best. We want to stay curious and open. We want to learn and connect with others. So we may not know a lot about this topic, but how can we start to learn and stay open and challenge ourselves to think about things in a new way?

MW: We want to maintain professionalism regarding cultural and religious backgrounds regarding working with LGBTQ+ clients. For some folks that may be a new concept or it may feel counter to certain things they've learned or ways that they've been raised. We want to maintain that professionalism and respect, not only to the clients that we're talking about, but also to our fellow staff. And we want you to be kind to yourself as you learn and improve service. We're always learning and growing, and it's okay if you didn't know something or you want to correct something that you were doing previously. Show that same kindness to staff with varying experience levels. We want to show each other, our colleagues and ourselves kindness as we continue to learn. So just keep these ground rules in mind as we delve into the content.

Every LGBTQ+ Story Is Unique

MW: Every LGBTQ+ story is unique. Every LGBTQ+ newcomer's experience is different and shaped by many stories and their own personhood. So, to define terms and think about the experience of LGBTQ+ newcomers, we're going to make some generalizations or think about what are some unifying themes that face LGBTQ+ newcomers. But we really want to acknowledge that everyone has their own story and that some of these terms have been created in a Western context or in the U.S. cultural setting. And we want to acknowledge that different cultures may have different norms, concepts, and terminology for various sexual orientations, gender expressions, and identities. The definitions—we're trying to create a shared language so that we can all talk about this together.

MW: But when you're working with LGBTQ+ people, whether they're clients, staff, or others that you know, we want to really think about what is their story? How do they want to be treated and addressed? And how can we support them with the unique person that they are? Like that is with every client that we're never going to generalize about all of our clients, but we are going to try to think about some patterns or best practices that might be generally supportive.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity/Expression (SOGIE)

MW: So let's define sexual orientation and gender identity and expression: SOGIE. So I'll be using the term SOGIE to encapsulate all of this so you can hear what that sounds like. Sexual orientation is emotional and



sexual attraction to and relations with different or same genders. Gender identity is a deeply felt internal experience of gender, which may or may not match sex assigned at birth. And gender expression is an outward manifestation of gender identity, often seen on a masculine-feminine spectrum. So this is the umbrella term, SOGIE, to capture these facets of identity. All these things, gender identity, who you feel that your gender is, who you're attracted to—these realities are in place for you, whether or not you've thought about them before or given them a name.

MW: We all have a gender identity. We all have a sexual orientation. And we're really delving in and learning these new words because we're going to focus on some marginalized identities within the SOGIE umbrella. So we might call them SOGIE minorities. Those of us as myself. So my name again is Maya. I use she/her pronouns. I am what's called cisgender. So I identify as a woman, which is the gender that I was assigned at birth, the sex I was assigned at birth. And that's a kind of privileged gender identity that I don't necessarily have to think much about my gender identity. But I want us to start thinking about those things today, whether we've thought about it or not.

The “Genderbread” Person: A Visualization of SOGIE

MW: So, another way to understand SOGIE on the next slide is the Genderbread person. This is a visualization of SOGIE so we can understand what the different elements of SOGIE are. Sex or sex characteristics, that's really what sex we were assigned at birth, often defined by our genitalia. Our identity is who we are, how we see ourselves, how we think about ourselves, our cognition, and so that's why identity is there with the brain. Expression is how we show our gender identity to others, so that's that outer part of the Genderbread person. How do we display our gender or our gender expression? And then attraction, that's the sexual orientation. Who are we attracted to? Who do we want to be in relationships with? Is it with men, women, non-binary folks? We'll get into some of these terms, but that's really who we're generally attracted to.

MW: So the last thing I want to say on this is that gender, in both identity and expression, is really understood socially. This is not a biological or kind of scientific category, that there's only one way to have a gender identity or expression. This is made, given meaning within our cultures. That's how we make sense of what our gender is and how it might change, how we might identify or express ourselves. So that's the SOGIE umbrella.

Gender Pronouns

MW: I want to talk next about gender pronouns. What is a gender pronoun? It's... Gender pronouns are words that refer to people in speech or writing. So some examples are she/her, that's the pronouns that I use that are associated with feminine pronouns. He/him as masculine pronouns, or they/them as gender neutral. So for folks who do not necessarily identify on that male-female binary, they may use they/them pronouns, and that's something to kind of start getting used to, to seeing and speaking.

MW: Why are gender pronouns important? Correctly using someone's gender pronouns shows basic respect for who they are and their gender identity. And how can I know or find out what they are? So, one way is to have them listed on your agency's intake forms for people to share openly. But you can offer your own pronouns as I did—“Maya Wahrman, my pronouns are she/her”—to demonstrate safety and lead by example. So really a good way to ask for pronouns because you don't necessarily want to put someone on the spot and say, “Oh, what are your pronouns?” Because they may not be sure this is a safe space where their pronouns will be honored. You can just introduce yourself along with your pronouns, and that way you open the door for someone to



share their pronouns rather than just assuming, “Oh, I think this is a woman, so I know her pronouns. I think I know this person's pronouns.” So that's some about gender pronouns.

LGBTQ+

MW: We're going to get now into what does LGBTQ+ actually mean? What does it stand for? So the individual words, which we'll get into, are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, or queer. There can be two meanings for that Q. And the plus signifies that this is an umbrella term, that this includes a lot of identities and not just the ones explicitly said in LGBTQ. There are lots of changes in language. We definitely want to stay current and inclusive as we talk, whether it's on this training or with our clients. I was reviewing the questions through the Zoom registration, and there were definitely questions, a lot of questions about this. How do we use the most inclusive language? You may have heard other acronyms, LGBT, LGBTQIA, and many others. They're all, they can all be valid or more accepted in certain communities or others.

MW: We've chosen for our suite of materials here at Switchboard to standardize and use LGBTQ+ as an umbrella term—not to say that other terms or other umbrella terms aren't valid, but to really to show that we want a unified kind of suite here. We really don't want folks saying, “Oh, LGBT, whatever. I don't know all those letters.” Like, that doesn't feel respectful to the community. I think always deferring to who you're working with and people from the community that you're meeting to learn what term might be most appropriate in that context is best. But we wanted to stay uniform and to have folks practice saying LGBTQ+ so that you can just get comfort in talking about these issues and helping support this community. So we're not here to tell other people how to identify or what terms to use. We're certainly not here to say, “Don't say LGBTQIA or anything else,” but really that's the term, the umbrella term that we've chosen to standardize here. And we just want people to feel comfortable using the terminology that's most respectful within their communities.

MW: So, breaking down these terms. Lesbian is a woman whose enduring romantic, emotional, and/or physical attraction is to other women. Again, there may be folks on this call who identify as lesbian and don't quite identify with this definition. So I'm not here to prescribe the definition, but hopefully to provide some useful terms for folks to understand these different identities that are within the LGBTQ+ umbrella.

MW: So, next is gay. An adjective traditionally used to describe men whose enduring romantic, emotional, and/or physical attraction is to other men. It's also used in other contexts or as a self-identifier across the community.

MW: Bisexual is an adjective that describes people who have the capacity for romantic, emotional, and/or physical attraction to people of the same gender as their own as well as to people of a different gender from their own.

MW: Trans or transgender are terms used by some people whose gender identity, and in some cases gender expression, differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans is independent of sexual orientation. So remember the Genderbread person: we have that sexual orientation, who folks are attracted to, and transgender would come more in that gender identity and potentially gender expression.

MW: Queer has historically been a negative term, but it has been reclaimed by LGBTQ+ people to describe themselves. It is considered inclusive of a wide range of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender



expressions. Some people also consider the Q within LGBTQ+ to mean questioning—anyone who's on a journey exploring their own gender identity or sexual orientation.

MW: And finally, that plus is the umbrella. This plus sign encompasses diverse LGBTQ+ experiences, so, various sexual orientations, gender identities, expressions, sex characteristics, any other terms used for identification. This is our nod to there are many, many ways to be human and to identify, and we want to include them all as we're talking about SOGIE minorities.

Other Terms

MW: Few other identity terms. An ally supports and advocates for a community they are not part of. So I am an ally of the LGBTQ+ community. I am not a member of the community, but I am deeply committed to supporting the LGBTQ+ community and fighting for their rights, inclusion, and justice.

MW: Intersex is a term that describes natural bodily variations in sex characteristics beyond the typical male-female binary. So this describes sex characteristics that don't fall in the male-female binary that may change someone's sex assigned at birth, and they may be intersex.

MW: Non-binary is a gender identity outside the male-female binary. So binary means that there's only two things, and often in our culture, gender is considered to be one or the other. Non-binary means you can be anything in between, and there really is no scientific gender binary; that's really only culturally defined.

MW: So these are some of our terms. Want to make a note? Oh, sorry. We have a few more terms. I skipped ahead in my notes. Coming out: coming out is a self-acceptance process of acknowledging and sharing one's identity. So if you are a SOGIE minority and you choose, you accept that and you choose to come out and tell someone, "Hey, I'm transgender. I'm gay," that's the coming out process. This is different from outing, which means intentionally disclosing someone's identity without consent. So if someone has told me that they are transgender, but they don't want anyone else to know, and I tell someone else without their consent, I've outed them, and that is a negative thing.

MW: The final term on here is transition: the process in which a transgender persons align their physical appearance with their gender identity. Transition can be a lot of things. Some famous or talked about ideas of transition can be hormonal therapy or surgery. But transition can be anything from just choosing to change some gender expression facets publicly so that physical appearance aligns with gender identity. It can mean asking to go by a different name or pronouns. It can mean legal changes, of changing your legal name, changing your name on documents or your gender marker on documents, or it can include those physical elements of changing appearance, getting medical treatment for a transition, et cetera. So there's a big spectrum of what counts and what's possible within transition.

Cultural Sensitivity and Terminology

MW: I want to make a note here that these are, again, these are often more Western terms, and there's so many ways to be human and especially to be LGBTQ+. So even if newcomers identify as LGBTQ+, they may not be familiar or comfortable with all these terms that we just went through, especially if their home country or community stigmatizes different LGBTQ+ identities. We want to be really respectful to that. Our, these shared definitions are going to allow us as service providers, as community members, advocates, and allies to speak the same language and identify and respond to needs of LGBTQ+ people. But these fixed definitions can limit



us from understanding the rich diversity of human experience, of sexual expression and gender identity. So we really want to appreciate that flexibility and fluidity of SOGIE and that particularly across cultures, because gender is understood within culture. This is a key to really creating greater inclusiveness and better services for the refugees and newcomers with whom we work.

MW: So we really want to follow people's lead on what terms they feel comfortable with, how they want to define themselves or talk about themselves. If they're interested in learning about terms that we use here in the United States, that's education we can provide. But we really want to make sure we're not imposing our own definitions, views, or expectations of how LGBTQ+ people should look, act, or identify. As all refugees have a right to self-determination and to build their own lives, that's also true with how we see ourselves in terms of SOGIE and the LGBTQ+ community. So those were a lot of terms. I hope those are helpful in helping us create this shared language as we come in.

2. LGBTQ+ Cultural Contexts and Experiences in Resettlement

LGBTQ+ Clients' Identities

MW: We're now going to think about cultural context and experiences and resettlement for LGBTQ+ folks. So, there's lots of different ways, just as there's lots of different ways to be LGBTQ+ in general, there's a lot of different ways to be an LGBTQ+ refugee or newcomer or asylee or humanitarian parolee. Some asylum claims or determinations of refugee status are based on clients' experience of persecution for their SOGIE. So we do have clients who receive asylum or have received refugee status because it was illegal to be LGBTQ+ in their country or they experienced severe social persecution for that. Other newcomers, and this is a lot of people, they may come out after their arrival and resettlement. And some LGBTQ+ clients, you will never know that they are part of this community because they don't come out or they don't feel comfortable sharing that information.

MW: Clients can come from countries with criminalization and/or severe social stigma of LGBTQ+ relationships or identities and expressions. So there's also a spectrum of where people are coming from. There are also refugees who come for reasons completely unrelated to their SOGIE, who then are, that's something they are journeying with when they arrive or in their service provision. So it doesn't, it's not predetermined what their relationship with their country of origin or their refugee status is and how they identify.

MW: I just want to give another lens of what the spectrum of things are around the world that, again, we have some areas that have criminalization. We have some areas that you can't get legally in trouble for being LGBTQ+, but you can have social stigma. You can be hurt by your family, by your community.

MW: And within the U.S., we'll get to this in a second, but within the U.S., we also have that diversity of experiences, even though there are some overarching federal policies to protect against certain discriminations. The social context piece can also vary much more than the law. Is it legal or not? And punishment or stigmatization across LGBTQ identities are not alike. So there can be privilege for folks who are, say, lesbian, gay, and bisexual but whose identity, gender expression seems to match their gender identity. It can be a lot less safe in many places in the world, including in many places in the U.S., for folks who are transgender. So that is kind of another aspect of diversity within this experience. You can maybe take a moment to just think about your clients, different clients that you work with, where they come from, and if you know what their culture's approach or their cultural context might be to LGBTQ rights, if it's ever come up, if you have any sense of if they were LGBTQ or if you know they're LGBTQ, what their experience might have been before coming to your agency.



Positive or Negative Laws and Policies Toward LGBTQ+ by State

MW: So, we want to look at this map of the U.S. This is from the Movement Advancement Project. This is a current map from this year that tracks different positive or negative laws and policies towards the LGBTQ+ community by state. So, as you can see that dark green, their analysis shows that there are higher levels of protections, explicit anti-discrimination laws within these states, and all the way down to those red states that have active negative policies against LGBTQ+ folks, whether that's discrimination, lack of, you know, blocking people's access to services. And you kind of have everything in between. So those orange states have low protections, so they may not have active policies against LGBTQ+ folks, but if people in the community are experiencing discrimination, they don't necessarily have protections or legal recourse.

MW: So in the U.S., for example, from a Supreme Court decision in 2015, gay marriage or LGBTQ+ marriage is legal in the country, but that is not enshrined, for example, in the Constitution. And it doesn't mean that access to other services or protections across the country are uniform for these folks. So we don't want to just say, "Oh, it's so great in the U.S. You know, gay marriage is legal." We really want to think about the variation of experiences that our newcomers not only had from their cultural context or the countries they came from but the different experiences they're going to have on arrival.

MW: Resettling someone in one of those dark green states, and if they're LGBTQ+, it may be more accessible to get them services, or if they experience discrimination then they'll be able to have some legal recourse, whereas if you're working in resettlement in one of these red states on the map and one of your clients is LGBTQ+, it may be more difficult to support that client with certain things they need or if something bad happens. So we really just want to acknowledge that diversity, especially because today we do have participants joining from all across the U.S., and that is going to impact what kind of support we can show our clients.

Impact of Community and Context

MW: So we want to think about the impact of community and context. At the heart of it, we have the individual and where they are situated within their family or the people they love that are close to them. Is this person viewed and accepted by those close to them? How are they viewed as an LGBTQ+ person? Loved ones can be hostile to LGBTQ+ identities, even if they love their child or parent or whoever it is. Loved ones may be hesitant or nervous. They may need education and information about "How can I support this person?" or "What does it mean that my daughter came out to me as a lesbian?" LGBTQ+ clients can have important relationships and close relationships, whether they are out or not. So people can have close relationships with their families, even if they are not out as LGBTQ+. That can be complicated. Those relationships can be complicated if they disagree over beliefs around gender and sexual orientation. And if someone comes out to their family and loved ones, that can be really difficult if they're not being accepted or if there's tension in that.

MW: I want to go next to if these are LGBTQ+ clients, then we have the agency and caseworkers. What is the agency's level of experience and commitment to open and affirming services? How are we accepting our LGBTQ clients? Are we attending trainings like these where we're learning and growing, and how we can support these folks? Do we have places in the agency where we can share, where clients can share their pronouns or preferred names, preferred identities? Are there visible markers of allyship and ways that they can know we are safe? So as you can see, I am wearing, for example, just my rainbow pin. I want folks to know that I'm an ally to this community, that I am a safe person to come to. There's lots of different ways to demonstrate allyship.



MW: We will be having a webinar on June 25th. We'll be sending more information, more about creating those allied and inclusive spaces. So this is a skill set that you can continue to grow with Switchboard this summer. But we really want to think also if a client comes out to us as LGBTQ+, how do we respond to their disclosure or needs? How are we now going to support them? What can we do on that agency level?

MW: The client exists within their cultural, religious, or ethnic community. That's kind of the next level. There can be a spectrum or variance of acceptance or opinions. So yeah, that's the next level. If we can click to that. Even within more conservative communities or religious groups, just as we're all different people with different opinions, there can be a spectrum of acceptance or opinions within different cultural, religious, and ethnic communities.

MW: Clients, even if that cultural, religious, and ethnic community is not as a whole very accepting to LGBTQ+ folks, clients may want strong relationships with their religious and ethnic communities. So even if they've come out to you as LGBTQ+, it doesn't mean that they don't want a separate or different relationship with that community. Those things do not have to be mutually exclusive. [We] can think about how much do clients' beliefs align with their communities'? How do they differ or clash with what the client's identity is or what the client is believing? So what are the tensions there? What might be some alignment between that community and the client's SOGIE?

MW: And finally, we think about that broader community. This goes back to thinking about that map of the U.S. You know, LGBTQ+ marriage is legalized in the U.S., but there are still many barriers and social discrimination. And this is really different by geographical location. So what's the political and social context of the neighborhood where the client lives, the town or city, the state or the region? Are there more localized legal protections and services available to folks? Even if there are those protections, discrimination can happen, especially if it's not being reported or no legal action is being taken. Anyone can be discriminatory anywhere, even if there are strong social protections. So thinking about what those outside community contexts are, are there other ethnic and religious communities? So beyond the client's own cultural, religious, or ethnic community that can contribute to different views on LGBTQ+, is it a very deeply conservative and religious area, even if that's not the client's religion, that may inform what people's perceptions of an LGBTQ+ person or LGBTQ+ refugee might be? So that's the impact of community and context.

MW: On the next slide, I really want to emphasize that what we have the most control over is our agency and our work as caseworkers. So we have to understand what the client's experience is in their family, with their loved ones, in their cultural and religious or ethnic community, and in the broader community. But the places where we can make the most change is in how we support clients. How we uplift them, how we respond to their disclosure is within our agency and the caseworkers. And so a lot of these best practices we're going to share today are really going to be in that realm of the agency and caseworkers.

Affected Resettlement Domains

MW: As you can imagine, we have a lot of affected domains that we are working in in resettlement that are affected by a client's SOGIE. So, health. What medical services do clients need that might be related to their SOGIE beyond, say, their refugee medical screening or whatever primary care services they're receiving? Do they need education about contraception or about testing for sexually transmitted diseases or any other sexual health? It can also mean if someone is looking for gender affirming care as we talked about, hormonal therapy or surgery, what does that specialized care look like?



MW: We also really want to think within the health domain. What is a sensitivity we need to have within the health care system, the confidentiality? So if someone has come out to you confidentially as transgender, who, if any of the doctors need to know what that is, what that SOGIE might be in order to provide the best physical medical services versus say, potentially a dentist who might not need to know as much information because that client's SOGIE is not relevant, as relevant to their medical case. So really thinking about when we need to keep that confidentiality and not erring if the client has come out to you confidentially, erring on the side of not oversharing that information. So that is just some of the considerations within health.

MW: Within housing, we want all of our clients to feel safe in their housing. Does an LGBTQ client feel safe to be themselves or express themselves how they want at home? Are they in danger in their housing because of their gender identity or expression or sexual orientation? Are they able to live freely where they are as freely as they want to, given where they are living? So that goes back to that outside community realm.

MW: Mental health, as you can imagine, and that's the next click, yeah, a lot of folks have experienced a lot of stigma and discrimination. Have they faced that in the past? Is that affecting their mental health now? Is there a history of trauma related to their SOGIE, whether it was them coming out and it being received badly or sexual abuse being targeted because of their SOGIE?

MW: Are folks experiencing internalized homophobia? So homophobia means discriminating against or disliking folks from the LGBTQ+ community. And even if someone is LGBTQ+, they can experience having grown up with homophobic ideas and so they actually are discriminatory against themselves, maybe without knowing it. They might still hold beliefs that being LGBTQ+ is bad, even though they themselves identify that way. If they were raised in a way that makes them uncomfortable with their own SOGIE, that can make a very difficult situation for someone's mental health.

MW: And then thinking if someone is ready to access mental health services, do those folks have access to sensitive mental health services if they want that can be culturally competent to their SOGIE? So if someone wants to work with someone who is a gender specialist to think about their journey, their own gender journey, do they have access to that? But at the same time, are those services also culturally competent and have linguistic access? So, as you know, for all refugees who want mental health services, it can be difficult to find someone who understands their culture or is willing to work with an interpreter in their language or speaks their language. And now imagine you want, you have that filter as well as trying to find mental health services that are sensitive to the LGBTQ+ community, so that can be a big barrier.

MW: Thinking about folks' social connection. Do LGBTQ+ clients have connections within their own ethnic, religious, and cultural communities? Are they isolated because of their SOGIE? Do they have connections with other LGBTQ+ communities if they want them? Is that something that's even available locally? So that's a big question.

MW: The next realm is employment and education. If folks want to be out, are they able to be out safely? If they want their SOGIE to be confidential, are they able to keep that confidential when they're at work or in class? This goes for where people work, how they're gender expressing at work, if they're able to do that safely and comfortably. This also goes for school for youth or English language learning classes or any other educational setting.

MW: And finally, thinking about immigration status for our clients. Obviously, immigration status is a big question that our refugees and newcomer clients are thinking about, but it can have some extra complications



for LGBTQ+ folks if they... if the gender on their immigration documents does not match their gender identity or desired gender expression. It can be a big barrier to change those documents. There's also something called the gender marker. So on your passport, it likely says your gender, and that's something that as folks are transitioning gender, they may want to change, and it can be difficult to do these things before even a green card is obtained, given the importance of those few documents, identifying documents that our clients have. So changing names, changing gender markers, trying to transition into a new identity can be really difficult for refugee and newcomer clients.

MW: Something else to think about is, do you have clients who have come together or entered in LGBTQ partnership who were not able to marry in the country they were from? Do they want to access marriage in this country? Do they want to legalize their partnership? That's another realm of this legal work that we have to consider with refugees. So these are just some broad strokes of what are the considerations when thinking about LGBTQ refugees? What are the intersections for our clients as refugees and as newcomers, and because of their SOGIE minority status, if they're LGBTQ+.

Case Scenario #1: John

MW: I want to pull up a couple of case scenarios to start thinking about some diversity in the LGBTQ+ refugee experience. So we're going to read through both these case scenarios, and then you'll have a chance to engage through a tool we call... that we have... that's called Slido. So case scenario number one is John. John is a gay East African refugee. The government discovered his relationship with his boyfriend, Emmanuel. Emmanuel was imprisoned and tortured, dying in prison, and John fled to a nearby country and was resettled to the United States. You are now his case worker, and he is known around your agency for his joyful personality. However, he has confided to you that he suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, and is seeking intensive mental health therapy to address his low mood and anxieties. So that's one case scenario that is John.

Case Scenario #2: Zeina

MW: The second case scenario is Zeina. Zeina is a political asylee from the Middle East. She was active in anti-government movements and fled the country after receiving death threats from government operatives. A few months into working with Zeina, she discloses to you that she is bisexual and has fallen in love with another woman in her English class. They would like to work toward moving in together, but they are afraid of telling others about their relationship or finding housing that would be welcoming to them.

Discussion Question

MW: So to join our Slido you can scan this QR code or you can go to slido.com and type in the number 3304199. I want you to think about an answer. Your answers will come up anonymously.

[How are John's and Zeina's experiences different, and how might that affect the services they need?](#)

MW: I'm going to see if I can copy in the text of these two case scenarios to you all. So there is John. I see folks are starting to engage. I'm excited to see what you have to say. So I've put both John and Zeina's case scenarios in the chat. I want to take a couple of minutes to think about their different situations and how we might work with them. I see a lot of people typing. Different resources are needed, medical for John, social housing-related for Zeina. So they're both experiencing difficult things, but they need different kinds of



referrals. They have a different SOGIE, they have different countries of origin, but they both face persecution. John faced traumatic experiences. He would benefit from grief work as well. Zeina has concerns about being outed, and it's not clear if John does.

MW: John is alone and Zeina has a partner. Counseling might be good for both of them. So, we're looking at different cultural contexts and... supporting those. They've had different life experiences. John has faced significant loss. John's—this is a good one—John's LGBTQ identity is the main reason he fled his country, whereas Zeina did not have to do it, the reason she fled her country. So many good responses coming here. I hope folks are reading these out, even if I'm not fast enough to read them all. They may both need cultural support and mental health resources. They have different levels of family support. Zeina might feel she's in more danger where she is. John needs support with a past traumatic event. Connecting with the community might be important. I may give one more minute for folks to get their thoughts out. I love seeing how you're all engaging with the content and thinking about how we can really support these folks.

MW: John is out; Zeina still has a fear of being seen as who she is. John would likely benefit from Preferred Communities in terms of case management; Zeina would likely benefit from counseling and housing support. So, we can really see some of these overlapping things that these folks might benefit from and different things, whether that's the mental health piece, the focus on housing, the focus on community connections, those would be really important differences to consider.

MW: I'm going to move on because we have a lot more things to cover, but I'm really grateful for all of your thoughtfulness and thinking about how we might support these clients differently and what their situations are like, so thank you so much for engaging. There will be one more Slido opportunity for you all to engage.

3. Serving LGBTQ+ Clients: Best Practices

MW: So we're going to get into a few best practices we want to share, and then I'm really excited to turn over to our lived experience panel, which I'll introduce in a bit, but first I just want to think of some basic tactics and practices.

What can we do as service providers?

MW: What can we do as service providers? I know this is why a lot of you are here, whether you are part of the LGBTQ+ community, whether you're an ally, whether you're ready to learn but you're new to these topics: How can I actually support LGBTQ+ clients when they come through my door? So we're going to think about some of these best practices together.

Basic Best Practices

MW: We always want to refer to the client in the way that they prefer, so the name they prefer, the pronouns. If the client tells you their pronouns to make sure to use them. If a client says, "I actually prefer to go by this name because..." for any reason, but especially because of a gender transition, we really want to respect that. Always refer to clients in the way that they want.

MW: We want to demonstrate allyship and show that we can provide a safe space, whether that's showing our pronouns, talking about the referrals that we have and the fact that our agency is open and affirming and inclusive for folks, and talking openly about SOGIE. This is a really important topic that we're going to be



discussing in further depth, both in that webinar that's coming up on June 25th, which we'll share the details about, but also in a certificate course I will be teaching with some guest instructors starting at the end of the month. So if you want to really learn a lot more about this, please stay tuned at the end. We'll share how you can apply for that certificate course. So we really want to demonstrate that allyship.

MW: We want to follow the client's lead on sharing their SOGIE information to keep it private if they wish. So, there might be those medical exceptions, if someone is doing a comprehensive physical exam and needs to know about a client's sex assigned at birth versus their gender identity, but in general if a client wants to keep their SOGIE private, we want to keep it private and not out people. We want to keep that information confidential.

MW: Really importantly, we never want to assume we know the client's experience or desires based on their SOGIE or their cultural or religious background. So, just because we know a client is LGBTQ+, we don't want to assume that that is the most important thing to them, or that they're only looking to connect with LGBTQ communities. At the same time, if a client is of a certain culture or religious background, we don't want to assume that they're not a SOGIE minority or that they're not part of the LGBTQ+ community. Never assuming in general is a good practice with clients, but especially when thinking about what we don't know. We might have LGBTQ clients right now that we don't know their SOGIE and so we want to be able to support folks and not assume, but really just take the client's lead.

Advocating For and With Clients

MW: So how can we advocate for and with clients? We can follow the client's lead and center their voice in service provision, and we can maintain open communication with clients. How do they want your support? So these are generally good tips for client-centered services, but we really want to focus on these in terms of respecting people's SOGIE. We want to protect client's confidentiality within and outside of the agency with other clients and service providers within the community. Think about that confidentiality. Does the client want their SOGIE to be known? Does everyone in your agency need to know that client's SOGIE if they've come out to you confidentially? Probably not. How can you protect that information even if other people are working with the client? How sensitive is that information in the client's mind? How are you honoring how sensitive and confidential they want their SOGIE to be? And again, we want to ensure safety at our agency, identifying safe and affirming spaces, which will come up again in our certificate course and in that upcoming webinar.

What if I have conflicting ethical, cultural, or religious beliefs myself?

MW: What if I have conflicting ethical, cultural or religious beliefs myself? This can be tough. We all come from different backgrounds, different cultures, and we're going to have different levels of comfort or beliefs around SOGIE and around LGBTQ+ communities. I want you to recall our ground rules to stay curious and open, to be kind to ourselves if we're finding some of those conflicts, but to think about how we can remain committed to serving all clients equitably and respectfully. How can we really maintain that commitment and extend kindness to staff with varying experience levels? So now that you're at this training, we're really glad that you know or you can help call others in and educate them, but extend the kindness to those who are also still grappling with these questions.

MW: We want to avoid referring clients out or refusing service based on personal beliefs that can actually be legally... illegal as a discrimination, and turn to your supervisors to process conflicts. If you're struggling with



how to deal with these issues or how to think about some of these topics, that's what your supervisor is there for, to really process that.

“I am not an expert; I am not ready to serve LGBTQ+ clients.”

MW: So you may think, “I'm not an expert. I'm not ready to serve LGBTQ+ clients. I just started learning an hour ago.” As an ethical and thoughtful case manager, you are ready to work with LGBTQ+ clients. We want to maintain our openness. We want to listen to clients and commit to life-long learning. We want to affirm our support to clients, to be honest about your learning curve. “Thank you so much for coming out to me. I really want to be supportive. This is something I need to learn more about. I'm committed to doing that while making sure that you feel safe and honored.”

MW: And we want to find more experts in appropriate referrals when dealing with specialized gender affirming care, legal questions, and mental health referrals. So just like everything else in resettlement, we don't have to do everything ourselves. It's not ethical to do everything ourselves when there's a better referral or if someone else is better, has better resources to support. Help find a gender care clinic, or a lawyer who specializes in gender transition, or a mental health expert who can work with LGBTQ+ refugees. We're here to support and validate everyone's right to services, but we're going to make sure that we refer out when that's more appropriate and can be more supportive to the client.

Case Scenario: Rodrigo

MW: So we have our last case scenario here of Rodrigo. You are working with Rodrigo, a Central American asylee who recently found your agency. Upon intake, you gather Rodrigo's documents and see that his green card lists him as Marta and as female. Your agency generally places single men in convenient dorm-style housing with a shared kitchen and living spaces. A month after placement, Rodrigo tells you he feels unsafe in his housing after hearing other men talking about gay men, and cross-dressers were discussed. Rodrigo has not officially come out to you as trans.

Discussion Question

MW: So the question, you can join at the same Slido link or QR code,

What is one step you could take to support and advocate for Rodrigo?

MW: So whether it's things that you already know or something you learned today—I've put the case scenario in the chat—we're just going to spend a minute or two thinking.

MW: Okay, we can acknowledge his feelings and validate his experience. We can ask what he would like support in. We can ask what steps... what next steps they would like to take in regard to housing? Think if it's possible to have no roommate so that they can feel safe. Ask him directly how you would like to be supported and listen to his concerns. Assist in finding alternative housing arrangements. Validate, ask what kind of support he needs. Offer verbal support. Provide accommodations. Help find a different housing situation. Don't out him. Signal that you're a safe person. Help him have a personal space. Continue to follow his lead and build trust and rapport. Connect to LGBTQ+ resources. Do not force Rodrigo to identify himself to you; they expressed a sense of unsafety. That's a really important one. Explore the options with him. Think about



supporting and providing other housing, offer alternative housing options if possible. Ask the client what services or resources are needed. Don't assume their identities. Confirm types of support needed. You can disclose your own pronouns and also provide knowledge of organizations with LGBTQ+ allyship.

MW: These are all really important suggestions. I love the client-centeredness asking Rodrigo what support he needs the most, not forcing him to tell you anything, modeling that you're a safe place and that you want to be supportive. Validating feelings, listening, and showing safety. And you're showing him that his confidentiality is the number one priority, and you're happy to provide all help and support that he needs. Examine the agency housing policy, and if there's an LGBTQ+ safe home. Those are really wonderful suggestions. Thank you all so much for engaging.

Lived Experience Panel

MW: I am going to move on to introduce our panelists. This is a lived experience panel. Both of these folks have lived experience as LGBTQ+ newcomers and now serve refugees and newcomers. We're really excited to have them. Kansiiime Shalom, pronouns are they/them, is a resettlement case worker at the International Rescue Committee in Denver and is a speaker with the Colorado Refugee Speakers Bureau. They are the co-founder and executive director of Women for Women Africa, an organization that advocates for equality for all lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender, queer and non-binary plus individuals as an activist and a peer educator for key population health services. Shalom continues to advocate for the inclusion of female-born and female-identifying individuals and has pioneered different programs for lesbian, transgender, and gender non-conforming refugees and nationals to engage in positions of leadership and broader economic development. They're working to create a safe space shelter to help reduce the number of LGBTQ and non-binary abuse in Kenya, both refugees and nationals who've been displaced, who are homeless because of their SOGIE.

MW: And Craig Mortley, pronouns are he/him, is an emerging social worker and scholar; diversity, equity and inclusion trainer; and forced migration practitioner dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and diverse refugee populations. As a second year PhD student at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work, Craig brings a unique perspective to his work, rooted in his own experiences as a former asylum seeker. His expertise encompasses a broad range of issue areas, including race and identity, gender-based violence, and equity-centered practices in refugee and asylum seeker integration, with a strong commitment to LGBTQ+ rights across the board. Craig's scholarly work is driven by a passion for fostering equity-centered practices, understanding refugee narratives, and enhancing refugee representation in decision-making spaces. His research critically examines the ethics of representation of queer displaced peoples, advocating for a continuum of care for displaced individuals beyond crisis assistance.

MW: Super excited to have these wonderful experts join us. If you can come off camera, Shalom and Craig. Hi there. We're so glad to have you. I want us to... I'm going to start with Shalom and then have Craig answer the same question:

Just tell us a little bit about yourself in your own words, your journey here and your experience, and how you ended up serving refugees and newcomers professionally.

MW: So, Shalom, I'll have you go first.

Shalom Kansiiime: All right. Hey, hey everyone. Thanks for being here. Again, my name is Shalom Kansiiime. I'm not going to repeat my bio. Maya already said it all. I began working with refugees when I had just, well, when I



was resettled in Denver. When I got to Denver, I knew what I wanted to do because it's more of what I had been doing before, and that was to still work with refugees. And I went ahead and made a few applications to different resettlement agencies because, again, I knew what I wanted. But I didn't get the job. I applied to IRC a couple of times and they didn't give me the job, but I still was persisting until they did. That's when I began working with newcomers and refugees. I'm still working with IRC as a caseworker, and yeah, with newcomers.

SK: Let me check the rest of the questions, was a long question. Yeah. So I've been working with refugees mainly for such a long time since I fled Uganda. Born East African, born and raised East African. I have been working with refugees for quite some time, for quite... with refugees and newcomers, both in countries of asylum and also right here, for I think now seven years. Yeah.

MW: Thank you so much, Shalom. It's great to have you. Craig, go ahead.

Craig Mortley: Thank you, Maya, and thank you, Shalom. And I'm thrilled to be here. So over a decade ago, I was forced to flee my homeland because of my queer identity and activism work that I was doing and filed for asylum in the U.S. I think, you know, as a Black, as a Black queer person, that experience kind of shaped my professional path that I'm currently on. As well as because of my understanding of the U.S. asylum system and the many challenges that I faced, I decided to get involved in the work so that others who come after me will have a better... experience as they navigate in the U.S. asylum system.

CM: One of the things that I noticed after the initial welcome and support that I received from a faith-based organization—and I just want to quickly state here that unlike refugees, many asylum seekers are not provided with support. And so the only support that folks sometimes have access to are community-based organizations or faith-based organizations, not necessarily federal funded. In some states, they might have access in very minimal way to some supports.

CM: One of the things I noticed is that there were many unmet needs, and oftentimes the nuanced experiences of these newcomers were not being considered when they were providing services. As well as within existing queer spaces, many of those spaces were not necessarily welcoming for displaced individuals, and oftentimes lack representation for newcomers of color. And so that kind of sparked my interest in terms of the current space that I'm in, to really grapple with a deeper understanding of the integration process, but primarily focus on inclusion and belonging, which is part of the scholarly work that I'm doing now.

CM: So over these many years, I volunteered with refugee resettlement organizations, community-based and faith-based organizations, with a particular focus on LGBTQ newcomers, particularly on asylum seekers. And part of what I have done over the course of time is to help to build the capacity of these organizations to meet the needs of this specific population. I've also done a few direct services, such as providing for material needs, such as food, housing, as well as improving access to health and mental health services and legal services for those seeking asylum. And have engaged in legislative and policy advocacy to improve conditions for folks as well as done educational outreach in higher educational institutions but also within the community, so that we can raise up the issue around the needs of LGBTQ newcomers. As Maya stated in my bio, this has driven me to really hone in on the concept of belonging and how does our programs and our communities really get at providing that inclusive space, an equitable space for LGBTQ newcomers to promote that sense of belonging.

MW: Thank you so much to both of you. We just know how much experience and expertise you both have, and so it's so great to have you join us. I'm going to pass this question first to Craig and then to Shalom:



What barriers or discrimination did you experience either within your own ethnic and cultural community or in the community where you resettled, and where, if at all, did you find affirming community to support [you]?

MW: So, you may have touched on some of these topics, but we'd love to hear a little bit more about your experiences.

CM: Thank you, Maya. So I first will start out broadly, and we've talked about some of this already. Many LGBTQ newcomers, they experience, you know, sort of... Even after they have been resettled, they still continue to experience fear around harassment, discrimination, threats of violence based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, even within states that have strong protections. Primarily as well, many of them still face these challenges within their diasporic communities—whether those are ethnic communities, religious communities, or cultural communities during their experiences with resettlement. Within the transit portion of their displacement for many LGBTQ asylum seekers, they have to navigate really difficult transition zones, and they're oftentimes exposed to daily harassment and violence due to their identities. And especially within the U.S. system, as policy has shifted and practices have shifted, which has made it more difficult for folks to claim asylum, those are considerable challenges that folks are facing in order to access services.

CM: The other huge piece of it that I face as well as others are challenges around discrimination based on race, and anti-LGBTQ legislation that impacts access to care for folks, as well as just based on the climate of anti-immigrant—this distrust of folks who are immigrants based on public sentiments. And so the intersection of race, queerness, and immigration status often leads to folks feeling excluded, excluded in places of finding employment and housing, but also feeling unwelcome in many predominant queer spaces as I mentioned.

CM: Particularly for me, one of the biggest challenges that I experienced was navigating the lengthy and uncertain asylum process and system. It is very complex and oftentimes changing; policies will change based on political administration. And there's oftentimes not adequate legal representation or support. And so I had to navigate a lot of this on my own with little to no legal help.

CM: I had a considerable long time in terms of before I was able to get an asylum herein, and so based on that experience, living in that kind of space of limbo was very difficult. It did take an emotional toll because virtually, life kind of is at a standstill. There are fears of deportation around the time that I was going through this process. There were many things that were happening on the immigration front, so there were fears of deportation that really added to the stress of the experience as well as feeling isolated, not having community and leading to hopelessness. I saw this with some of my friends, that their mental health kind of deteriorated because of those experiences.

CM: In terms of, for the second part of the question, where I found support, in the area I was living, there was a small grouping of other asylum seekers and asylees who intentionally came together to create a social support network for folks. And so while they were not able to provide like material support for many folks, what they were instrumental in doing is creating that sense of community, but also providing information and referrals to services of how to navigate the asylum system as well as how to access social services, those that were available to us. The other space that I also found affirming and supportive was individual allies that I met along the way doing my voluntary work and outreach. And those relationships were very instrumental in terms of helping me to reestablish, I'm alive here in the U.S.



MW: Thank you so much, Craig. And I love your affirmation of allies as a way to try to move forward despite all these barriers. Shalom, I'd love to hear your answer to this question.

SK: Thank you so much, Craig, for sharing. That's amazing. Well, some of the barriers that I faced when I, when I got here was mainly community navigation. And coming from a background where it's illegal to be LGBTQ and then transferring to a place where you're actually free to be who you are, in spaces where it's, well, people are persecuted, you will find power within community and community becomes family. And moving towards a... moving into a spot where, moving into a country where people are free to be who they are, we find that community is not such a very big deal for them anymore because people have learned to live by themselves and not consider as community to be part of family or, you know, the power that comes with it. And as a newcomer, navigating the right community with where I can find shared experiences of people was one of the biggest challenges, because it's like just the way English is a foreign language, this is also a different, a whole different language because you're trying to connect with a community of people that would not understand your experiences being, coming from a place where you were being persecuted for being who you are.

SK: And the other barrier was navigating gender-affirming care. This comes from a place of finding the right connections or the right information one needs to be able to actually sit within their identity and affirm who they are, other than health care providers dealing with you in a space of, "Ah, you know what? You are free here." And we have been dealing with people who are actually, used to be, know or are familiar with every single thing. So extra care and extra support is required for newly resettled newcomers when it comes to gender-affirming care and how to navigate the whole system. And mainly, mental health support. And I found it that health care providers don't actually take enough time with clients to actually guide them through the whole process.

SK: Also depression is one of them and also one of the biggest things. Some of the experiences I'm—some of the barriers and experiences I'm sharing are not just mine, but also for a few people that I was able to talk to and shared some of their challenges with me. So depression is also another thing. The thought of starting over is not new to most refugees, but starting over in a spot where, in a place where, yes, you are free to be who you are, but away from family, family which is community, and away from people who have... with whom you have shared experiences, can really be challenging. And navigating that by yourself in a space where there isn't even the starting community of people that you can relate with is the biggest challenge that, well, most of the people that get here, or most of the newcomers when they get here, they find it hard connecting with other people because they won't understand them. And mental health is not something that is highly advocated for in countries of asylum. So when most newcomers get here, that's also one of the biggest challenges.

SK: And also health or to add on to health care, most of the LGBTQ people or newcomers, sorry, most of the LGBTQ newcomers, once they get here, most of these people don't have families. So the friends and community that they build while here become that for them. And you find that in cases of emergencies, health care providers or health care facilities ask for families to be the next of kin, not knowing that these people actually don't have this. And this has put so many of the people I actually know and have been in the U.S. for something like two or three years, in a place where they can't seek out support from friends because friends are prohibited in their spaces, in health care facilities. And I think this would be one of the biggest barriers when it comes to the health care system with LGBTQ refugees and newly arrived people. Yeah.

MW: Thank you so much. I'm going to combine my next couple of questions because they overlap a little bit, and I want to give you a little more time to answer.



[Is there] a best practice you experienced in your resettlement or migration as an LGBTQ+ person from a service provider, or [is there] something that you wish that a service provider would have done differently to support you as an LGBTQ+ client?

MW: I'll pass this to Craig first. Feel free to answer both or just one of the aspects of that question.

CM: Thank you, Maya. I think one of the best practices that I see, and though I'm going to speak to it kind of from a legal provider, it could be applied to other spaces. So this agency that I'm financially associated with provided a holistic approach. It was a legal agency, but they provided a holistic approach to their services. So in addition to providing attorneys, they also had a mental health component to their service and had specialized trauma support for LGBTQ folks. That was a specialization of theirs. They had culturally competent social case workers who worked within an interdisciplinarity model. So it was a case worker, the mental health provider, as well as the attorney who would then work together to provide support for that client. One of the things that they realized, and more and more legal services are providing this, that they found that when the material needs of these asylum seekers were not being met, when their basic needs were not being met, they could not work on the cases. And so that was a first step in addressing some of those, so that they can move forward and work on those cases.

CM: The other thing I found very helpful was the intentionality of creating safe spaces for folks. So whether that is regular meeting space, whether that's support groups or social events where folks can build their network. As you know, Shalom mentioned, sometimes folks just don't have community and they don't have family and so that community becomes very important to them.

CM: I think in terms of one of the things I would love to see people do differently, much of the space I've operated in are community-based spaces. And one of the things that I saw that was challenging for me was grant-funded agencies exploiting LGBTQ newcomers and their crisis stories in order to raise funds and to get volunteers. It does limit how we see folks and it continues this deficit narrative around the contributions that these newcomers can make and does not really focus on the resilience and strength of these folks. And so that is something I would love to see us shift away from. I know that sometimes sharing those stories are important to having that, creating that empathy, but at the same time if that is not provided with social and emotional support for folks, then it can be very much damaging for the folks who have to constantly relive sharing these crisis stories.

MW: Thank you, Craig. Such an important answer. Go ahead, Shalom.

SK: One person I would like to give flowers to is Rossi from ACC. He was really supportive. I really appreciate him for that. When I had just got here and being referred to... I knew what I wanted and I knew how to look for it, but I didn't know where to start. So the referrals I got for the specific services that I needed were really supportive. And I think offering this kind of support to all other clients that have just got to the U.S., even without assuming what someone's pronouns are is really important because you never know what someone ever goes looking for. And getting referrals to different community centers and different places I could get any kind of LGBTQ-related support and community was one thing that I really appreciated about the resettlement agency, which is ACC that resettled me.

SK: And yeah, personally, when it comes to lived experiences, I would say I kind of knew what I wanted and where to start from, because I speak English, but my concern would be for the people that actually don't speak English, once they get here and have to learn a whole new language. And I think connecting these clients to



communities that would be of support or connecting them with other different clients who are from the same place or same country would be of support, and that it'll help them be able to create community within themselves. Yeah.

MW: Thank you so much. For our last question, as then we're going to have to wrap up very unfortunately, I could stay here for another hour, but:

For someone on this call or who's watching the recording later who's new to learning about LGBTQ issues and serving LGBTQ clients, what's some practical advice or concrete advice you might be able to give for them to learn more and improve their service provision?

MW: Shalom, I'll have you start us off.

SK: Okay. Well, to start, serving LGBTQ refugees take patience, I would say, because most of them have and are on a healing journey that some of them even forgot about. And most of them forgot about all these wounds that they have been carrying around for such a long time through their journey of asylum and till resettlement. And it is... I would say it's really important to ask, and it is really beautiful when you ask a client what their preferred names are and preferred pronouns... because this is the first step to showing a client that you are affirming who they are and you see who they are. It's something small, but it has a very big impact into the life of, towards the client or the person that... towards the LGBTQ person that you're talking to.

SK: And giving them referrals and tips to mental health or referrals to possible therapy, even if... and having these services to their disposal when they need them would be such a great thing to do. And connecting clients, again to different communities or different people that you think they would actually get along with or get to connect with and they will be of support would be really amazing.

SK: And then I would say lastly, it would be health care providers also need to learn more about how best they can support the LGBTQ refugees, newcomers, and those that have been here for a while because, again, these are the people that don't have family... Most of them don't have family here and need that kind of support. So yeah, I believe the health care system should also be educated on some of the challenges that come with the LGBTQ newcomers. Thank you.

MW: Thank you so much, Shalom. I really appreciate it. Go ahead, Craig.

CM: So I would say, first start if it's somebody we knew, I would encourage folks to start off by continuously educating themselves around LGBTQ issues so that they can understand the spectrum and the nuances, as well as the historical context and the cultural context of folks. You won't know everything and that is okay, acknowledging that you don't know but starting off by educating yourself.

CM: I'd also encourage folks to get involved directly. Within our communities, there are existing agencies, organizations, community groups, whether they're working on advocacy, whether they're hosting pride events or celebration, get involved in those spaces, volunteer in those spaces when your time allows so that you can understand some of the nuances of the culture, as well as the needs of folks. Particularly if they're existing organizations and groups that support newcomers, that would be an important space to get involved in the work to deepen your understanding on the issues that folks face.



CM: Listen attentively, listen actively, be empathetic when folks are sharing. You don't have to know everything. You don't have to rescue folks, and so just being open and validating folks, not making assumptions, using inclusive language, creating affirming spaces where folks feel welcome. Not just for the sake of boundaries aside, if you are working in professional setting, think about how do we create inclusion for folks?

CM: The other thing I would say is that for folks who are in leadership in organization, is to get the voices of the individuals you are serving as part of that decision-making space. And so speak with and invite and create space for folks with that lived experience to contribute to policy formulation, contribute to service provision so that you are actually hearing from folks what their needs are and not just you prescribing what you think they need.

MW: I want to thank you both so much. I think these are really actionable pieces of advice and also just sharing part of your story, which really helps us understand some of the richness of the LGBTQ experience for refugees and newcomers backed up by the amazing work that you do every day to support folks. So I really want to thank you.

Conclusion

Feedback Survey

MW: I'm going to ask Patricia, who is doing behind the scenes for this webinar, to pull up our survey, and she's also going to put it in the chat. This is a short survey that lets us know how we could improve our services in the future, what you liked about this webinar, et cetera. It will be sent out with the other information. You can scan this QR code or click on this link.

Upcoming Programs

MW: I also, in our last 30 seconds here, I know we're at time, but I really want to highlight these upcoming programs that we have. We will have a webinar on creating inclusive spaces, really focusing on demonstrating allyship and walking the walk in terms of being an ally in refugee resettlement and newcomer services for the LGBTQ+ community. That registration will open shortly. It's Tuesday, June 25th from 1:00 to 2:15 Eastern. We'll have a webinar on July 9th on supporting URMs, unaccompanied refugee minors, in an LGBTQ+ responsive manner. That'll be July 9th from 2:00 to 3:15 Eastern. And I will be teaching our certificate course on enhancing services for LGBTQ+ newcomer clients. Craig is one of our guest instructors. He will be there for the first half of the course, so if you want to learn more from Craig and all our other folks, I encourage you to apply. The application is live. It has been sent out. We'll meet weekly on Wednesdays, four Wednesdays from June 26th to July 17th from 2:00 to 3:30 PM Eastern. All of this information, as well as the slide deck and the recording, are going to be sent out to everyone who registered for this webinar and to everyone who attended.

Stay Connected

MW: So I really want to thank our panelists. We are going to wrap up now to respect folks' time. We could learn much more from you, and I hope we'll have the opportunity to do so. So I appreciate you joining us today, and thanks for joining us to learn at Switchboard. Please stay connected by submitting a technical assistance request or looking in our resource library, going to our website, our LinkedIn, or our social media. Thank you so much.



The IRC received competitive funding through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Grant #90RB0052 and Grant #90RB0053. The project is 100% financed by federal funds. The contents of this document are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.