TRUE
COLORS
UNITED.

INCLUSION TOOLKIT.

An introduction.

Creating a space where everyone feels welcome can be difficult, especially since everyone has different needs. This Inclusion Toolkit will walk you through the process of creating a more inclusive and affirming environment for young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) and will also equip you with the policies and tools to back it up.

This toolkit is informed by True Colors United's Inclusion Criteria, which were developed as a baseline for creating inclusive and affirming environments. These criteria include:

• LGBTQ+ Affirming Paperwork

• Non-discrimination/Inclusion Policy

• All-Gender/Single-Use Restroom

• Visible Safe Space Signage

• Diversity Posters

Terminology.

Before we get started, here are some terms and general definitions we'll be using throughout this toolkit. Please remember that different people may have different definitions for these terms, especially when used to identify themselves. These terms are also subject to change as our understanding of gender and sexuality evolves.

Gender Identity: Refers to a person's innate identification as a man, woman, neither, both, or some other gender. A person's gender may or may not correspond to the sex assigned to them at birth.

Gender Expression: Refers to the way a person communicates their gender to the world, including dress, grooming, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions.

Cisgender: Refers to a person whose gender identity or gender expression matches the sex that was assigned to them at birth.

Transgender: Refers to a person whose gender identity or gender expression is different from the sex that was assigned to them at birth.

Gender Expansive: An umbrella term sometimes used to refer to a person whose gender identity goes beyond the traditional definitions of male and female. Other terms that might be used include 'genderqueer' or 'gender non-conforming.'

Intersex: Refers to a person whose sexual anatomy or chromosomes do not fit with the traditional markers of "female" or "male"

Two-Spirit: An observance in many Indigenous communities that considers some LGBTQ people to have male and female spirits.

Sexual Identity/Sexual Orientation: Describes an individual's emotional and/or physical attraction to another person or people.

Lesbian: Refers to a woman who is attracted to other women.

Gay: Refers to a man who is attracted to other men. This term is also used for anyone who is attracted to another person with the same gender identity.

Bisexual: Refers to a person who is attracted to both men and women.

Pansexual: Refers to a person who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to people of any sex or gender identity.

Queer: An umbrella term sometimes used to refer to a person whose attraction and/or identity goes beyond the traditional definitions associated with sexual orientation and gender identity. Different people use this term to mean different things.

Visual cues.

Creating a safe and affirming environment does not just happen incidentally; it is done intentionally. A great way to start is by providing visual cues.

A visual cue could be anything from a sticker indicating a safe space to a poster featuring diverse gender presentations to a mural celebrating an entire community. These visual cues send a message to everyone who enters a space that all identities are welcome and supported. Visual cues should be prominently displayed in common areas including lobbies, entrance ways, and restrooms.

Action steps:

- Prominently display "Safe Space" stickers in common areas.

- Display posters featuring diversity in gender presentations and with themes of diversity and inclusion.

DIVERSE INCLUSIVE ACCEPTING WELCOMING SAFE SPACE FOR EVERYONE

ARTWORK BY AIDAN O'DONOHUE

Staff development.

Hiring and Onboarding

A culture of acceptance should be asserted the moment a potential staff member, volunteer, or visitor enters a space. When interviewing new staff, ask questions directly relating to the individual's opinion of LGBTQ identities. Also, require staff members or volunteers to complete LGBTQ competency training before they interact with young people. No exceptions.

Below are some sample statements and questions that a hiring manager can mention in an interview setting to assess the interviewee's level of understanding of LGBTQ issues.

Sample Statements/Questions:

- [Agency] is actively engaged in creating affirming environments for all youth. This is a safe space for LGBTQ youth to be their authentic selves.

- If a young person disclosed to you that they were questioning their gender identity, what would be your next steps?

- How would you respond to a young person changing their pronouns or name?

- What are your thoughts on housing young people based on gender rather than sex assigned at birth?

- What is your comfort level in answering questions from LGBTQ youth about safe-sex practices and prevention methods?

Staff Training

The culture of an agency or residence is defined from the top down. In order to have a culture that is accepting and supportive, there needs to be buy-in at all levels. From executive leadership to direct service staff to transportation and maintenance workers, every team member needs to truly believe LGBTQ youth have a right to safety and self-expression.

Action step:

- Implement mandatory LGBTQ competency as part of your onboarding process.

- Require all current staff to complete an LGBTQ cultural inclusivity course.

- Encourage organization-wide conversations about LGBTQ cultural competency.

Policies into practice.

Posted Policies
While organizational practice can adapt to the needs of clients, formal policies must also be enacted to reflect these changes. A general rule of thumb is that if it's not written, it doesn't exist. Policies protect both youth and staff, and policies supporting LGBTQ youth should be displayed prominently.

Intake Forms and Agency Paperwork
Paperwork, even if only used internally, should always reflect the gender, pronouns, and name of a young person. State-required filing systems may not provide a field for entering a name or gender outside of the name and sex assigned at birth; however, that information should be noted repeatedly within case notes and other paperwork. Brochures and websites should reflect that the agency is an affirming, supportive, and safe space for everyone, specifically LGBTQ young people. During initial assessments, all young people should be asked their name (which may not match their legal ID) and their pronouns (which may not match their legal gender marker). This can be modeled by the staff person offering their own name and pronoun first. Asking additional questions, such as gender and sexual orientation, can wait until a relationship has been developed.

Restrooms
Not every space has restrooms created with the intention of all-gender access, but they can still be designated! Single stall restrooms can easily be converted to all-gender with a simple sign. If single stall restrooms do not exist, allow youth to use the restroom in which they feel comfortable. The same accommodations should be applied to locker rooms and showers, even if it means finding times during the day when only transgender young people have access to the facilities.

ALL-GENDER RESTROOM

Action steps:

- Create and display inclusive agency policies.

- Create and implement intake paperwork that is inclusive of varying gender and sexual identities.

- Designate an all-gender restroom.

Looking for examples? Refer to the resources at the end of this Toolkit.

Reprogramming.

Centering Youth Voices
Whenever decisions are being made that impact young people, it's important that youth are at the table and have equitable decision-making responsibilities. This can look a number of different ways: working with young people to establish a youth leadership body, including one or more youth representatives on a board of directors, and creating opportunities for young people to speak for themselves. Young people who are receiving services should be encouraged to participate in decisions that directly impact their housing and wellbeing.

Workshops
Agency programming should be reflective of the youth involved. It is important to include an LGBTQ youth perspective in all programs and workshops. Examples include sexual health workshops, movie nights, healthy relationships workshops, and Know Your Rights trainings. If possible, activities specifically for LGBTQ youth, such as an LGBTQ Dance Night or an LGBTQ discussion group, should also be available to foster personal growth and community.

Partner Up
No organization is an island! Working collaboratively creates a community-centered response to support LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness, rather than a response rooted in crisis management. Partnering with LGBTQ advocacy organizations can help keep you up to date on what is happening in the community.

Action steps:

- Have all staff wear pronoun buttons to introduce the idea of sharing pronouns with other staff and participants.

- Consider developing a youth leadership body to reframe how young people inform your work.

Resources.

True Colors Inclusion Directory | www.truecolorsunited.org/directory
If you work at a youth-serving organization that provides housing and/or supportive services, make sure your agency is listed in our Inclusion Directory. As you implement the recommendations provided in this Toolkit, upload photos of your inclusive and affirming space to let young people know they're welcome.

True Colors Learning Community | www.truecolorsunited.org/courses
Many of our Learning Community members, service providers in particular, are unable to attend in-person trainings and webinars due to restrictive costs and time constraints. Our Learning Community provides short, engaging, interactive content that service providers can access at the time and pace of their choosing.

Youth Collaboration Toolkit | www.truecolorsunited.org/collaborate
Developed as a partnership between the National Youth Forum on Homelessness (NYFH) and the True Colors United, this toolkit was initiated by NYFH and the content was shaped by their voices. The ideas and concepts included in this toolkit will help ensure that young people are authentically engaged while collaborating with the affirming adults in their lives.

Sample Inclusive Policies | www.truecolorsunited.org/policies
This resource contains sample policies that can help set a standard of inclusion and safety for all youth who might access services or resources at a given organization.

Inclusive Paperwork Guide | www.truecolorsunited.org/paperwork
This resource will provide some first steps to developing intake forms (and other paperwork) that are inclusive of LGBTQ youth!

Online Store | www.truecolorsunited.org/store
Please visit True Colors United's online store to purchase pronoun buttons, safe space stickers, and diversity posters. All proceeds support the True Colors United's work to end LGBTQ youth homelessness.

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www.TrueColorsUnited.org