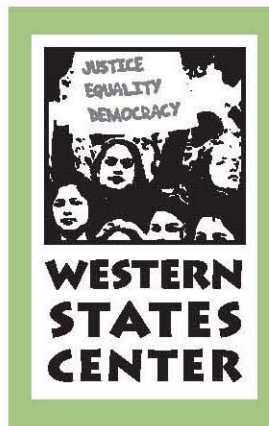


UNITING COMMUNITIES

FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND SEXUALITY PROJECT





In the past 20 years Oregon has faced more than 33 anti-gay ballot measures at the state and local levels. While most of the previous statewide measures were defeated, in 2004 voters approved Measure 36, which banned marriage between same sex couples. It was a difficult campaign in which the religious Right was able to use race as a wedge. From hiring a person of color as the spokesperson for the campaign to ads that specifically targeted communities of color, the opposition used the voices and faces of communities of color to project their homophobia. And while many leaders of color publicly opposed the ban, the work in straight communities of color around lesbian/gay/bisexual/trans/queer (LGBTQ) equality was weak.

Coming into 2008, LGBTQ leaders and allies faced two likely anti-gay ballot measures. The measures would have repealed recently won legislation outlawing discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity and recognizing domestic partnerships. Mobilizing communities of color to support LGBTQ equality would be critical to defeating the measures, and the work and relationship building needed to start early and go deep.

FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND SEXUALITY

While the potential measures did not end up on the November 2008 ballot, the critical work of engaging communities of color around LGBTQ equality was at the heart of our Family, Community, and Sexuality Project (FCS). From May 2008 to February 2009, the Center worked with four Oregon organizations that operate in communities of color to incorporate LGBTQ issues into their work. The groups—all based in communities of color or immigrant/refugee communities—spent ten months making their work more inclusive of LGBTQ members, who are so often invisible and whose issues are frequently marginalized.

The four groups were: Latinos Unidos Siempre (Salem), Salem Keizer Coalition for Equality, Oregon Students of Color Coalition (statewide), and Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (Greater Portland).

PROJECT ELEMENTS

The project included four primary components: **convenings, on-site technical assistance, peer-to-peer relationship building, and curriculum & resource development**. In addition, the Center provided each group with a \$4,000 grant to support participation in the project.

CONVENINGS

We convened groups three times for training, discussion, and sharing. As one participant stated, “The convenings provided a space for us to generate ideas with other groups, which added useful and richer strategies for us to plan the conversations with our membership in the coming months.”

Each convening included time for participants to check in with each other; evaluate their organizations’ progress; develop the skills to build comfort and familiarity with LGBTQ issues; and hear a resource organization share its own story of engaging on LGBTQ issues. Resource organizations included: Partnership for Safety and Justice, PCUN (Pinos y Campesinos Unidos del Noreste/Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United), Ainsworth United Church of Christ in Portland, and Californians for Justice.

Basic Rights Oregon, a statewide LGBTQ rights organization, also participated in all three convenings. This created an opportunity for groups to learn more about current priorities and challenges faced by the LGBTQ community and for BRO to develop relationships, share their experience, and listen to feedback from organizations working in communities of color.

“THIS HAS MADE A BIG IMPACT NOT JUST FOR OUR PROGRAM BUT FOR THE LARGER IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE COMMUNITY. PEOPLE ARE ASKING, “WHAT’S LGBTQ?” IT’S BETTER TO QUESTION THAN JUST TO IGNORE THE ISSUE.”

– Diana Lee, Refugee and Immigrant Family Strengthening Volunteer Coordinator, IRCO





"...BEFORE I COULD NOT SPEAK UP AND EXPRESS MYSELF. AND, THANK YOU TO WESTERN STATES CENTER, I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO ALL THESE."

– Javier Quiroz, Parent Organizer and Program Coordinator, SKCE

ON-SITE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

At the outset of the project each group assessed their current integration of LGBTQ issues into their organization. Using this assessment as a baseline, Center staff then worked intensively with the groups to design and implement workplans to better integrate gender and LGBTQ issues into existing programs; build skills for organizers and staff; and develop workshops and trainings for members.

Each group received between 50-100 hours of on-site time from Western States Center staff. During these on-site technical assistance sessions, Center staff were able to strategize with groups about constituency and audience and how to embed LGBTQ equality into existing programs in meaningful ways. The sessions also served as a way to model the skills staff needed to develop in order to meaningfully engage LGBTQ constituents in their work.

PEER-TO-PEER RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

An important value of the project was to create dynamic new relationships among groups and leaders of color doing this work. These new relationships mean that organizations are not alone in taking steps forward, and have a peer support network to deal with challenges that may come up along the way.

The Center also invited groups outside of the project for peer-to-peer training, in order to expand the circle of relationships. For example, when it became clear that LUS wanted to do a homophobia training for its youth members, the Center brought in the Seattle Young People's Project (SYPP) to conduct the training. As an organization based in and working with youth of color and queer youth, SYPP was able to provide training that connected youth across identity and geography.

RESOURCE & CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Through the course of the project, Center staff developed numerous tools and workshops for groups to use. Our initial “Assessing Our Organizations” training looks at how organizations integrate LGBTQ members and issues into their programs, decision making, culture, personnel, and policies, while political education sessions examined critical topical issues such as the fallout from California’s Proposition 8.

IMPACTS, OUTCOMES, AND FUTURE

This project consisted of many kinds of conversations that happened in a myriad of contexts, with diverse audiences, and targeting a range of goals. The outcomes reflect this breadth and depth. At the project’s conclusion groups assessed their progress in five areas: **People, Program, Policy, Culture, and Power**. Each group addressed all five areas, but also went deeply into one or two based on where they were at and where they needed to shift strategically to intensify their work. Individually and collectively, they are all now in a better place from where they began.

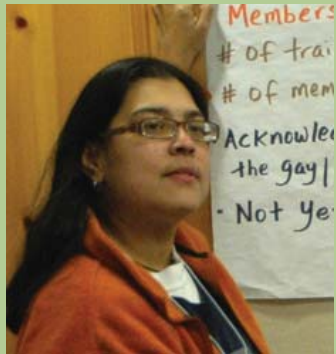
PEOPLE

Salem Keizer Coalition for Equality (SKCE) is a Latino parent organizing group based in Oregon’s Willamette Valley that advocates for their families’ rights within the public school system (the second largest in the state, with the heaviest concentration of Latino youth). SKCE grappled with deep fears of losing members and leaders if they elevated LGBTQ and gender issues onto their agenda. Their progress is best exemplified by the development of their lead organizers, Javier and Maria, who have since shifted their own personal views regarding gender and sexual orientation and have become strong advocates for LGBTQ rights within the organization. In December 2008, SKCE hired their first openly queer parent organizer to work on school equity issues.



“OUR [ORIGINAL] CURRICULUM REVOLVED AROUND SPECIFIC LATINO CULTURAL CONCEPTS. THEN WE ASKED, “HOW COULD WE IMPLEMENT THIS?” WE SAW PLACES WHERE WE COULD DO IT VERY EASILY. ... WITHOUT THE CENTER WE CERTAINLY WOULDN’T HAVE GOTTEN THIS FAR.”

- Levi Herrera-Lopez, Director, LUS



"THIS WORK IS SO IMPORTANT FOR ME ON A PERSONAL LEVEL AS WELL AS FOR OUR COMMUNITY, NOT JUST IN THE LATIN@ COMMUNITY, BUT IN THE LARGER SOCIETY OVERALL."

- Jackie Yepes, *Train the Trainer*
Coordinator, SKCE

PROGRAM

Oregon Students of Color Coalition (OSCC), a statewide organization of college, university and community college students, used the project to create seven training modules in which more than 50 students participated. With curriculum development support from the Center, OSCC created tools to begin basic conversations around queer justice and build shared language among student leaders of color. Taking advantage of political opportunities presented by Proposition 8 in California, they held deeper conversations about communities of color, voting, and ballot measures. OSCC also deepened staff skills to recruit and engage queer students in their priority issue campaigns.

POLICY

The Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) is a large social service provider operating in the Greater Portland area. With a staff of 150 they implement programs addressing issues of immigrant and refugee support and self-sufficiency. IRCO works closely with Southeast Asian, African and Slavic immigrant and refugee populations and began this work with their domestic violence program. The Center helped them to see the need to revise their policies and protocols for responding to LGBTQ immigrant/refugee clients with partner violence issues. Making an agency-wide change is challenging, and this first step helped them develop and prepare a model which they can now replicate throughout the organization. IRCO's Youth Support Services program has now begun using this model in their work with disadvantaged and at-risk youth.





CULTURE

Latinos Unidos Siempre (LUS) is a Latino youth organizing group based in Salem, OR with student-led chapters throughout the area. LUS leaders saw the need to build a more inclusive and welcoming culture for their organization. They began to deepen a relationship with the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) at one of their high schools by collaborating on joint projects and activities. At their student leadership development retreat, they reached out to and invited GSA leaders to participate. At the end of the retreat, some Latino youth came out to the staff and student leaders, commenting they had never before felt safe to step up and speak out to their ethnic community.

POWER

All four organizations saw the need and challenges to meaningfully shift power within their organizations to reflect LGBTQ leadership. With help from Western States Center each organization came up with action steps to deepen their impact and further their efforts to integrate LGBTQ issues into their organizations.



NEXT STEPS

Based on the work of the Oregon Family, Community and Sexuality project, the Center plans to publish a tool kit in Fall 2009. For information on how to support this tool kit contact Kalpana Krishnamurthy at kalpanak@wscpx.org or 503-228-8866.



WESTERN STATES CENTER

GENDER JUSTICE PROGRAM

Family, Community, and Sexuality is a project within Western States Center's Gender Justice Program. The program seeks to build regional capacity to advance work on issues rooted in gender oppression. Through building shared language and analysis and providing organizational support, the program increases the tools and resources available to organizations moving a gender justice agenda.

Whether organizations are fighting for LGBTQ equality, funds to help stabilize families, or access to reproductive health care, the Gender Justice Program supports their efforts through training, organizational development, and convening groups for peer-to-peer learning.

To learn more about Western States Center's Gender Justice Program, contact Kalpana Krishnamurthy at kalpanak@wscpdx.org or 503-228-8866.

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