Supporting Trans* Teens in the Public Library

A BRIEF HOW-TO CHAPTER FROM <u>Gender Issues and the Library: Case Studies of Innovative Programs and Resources</u>
available in December 2017 from McFarland

Who?

Trans* in this context is being used to indicate all the variations of gender identity that exist outside of binary conceptions of male and female. This includes teens who identify as:

▸ Transsexual (the gender opposite to the one they were assigned at birth and intend to alter or have altered their bodies to match)

▸ Transgender (those who identify as the gender opposite to the one they were assigned but may not wish to alter their physiology)

▸ Gender non-conforming teens (there are a range of gender expressions that are not exclusively masculine or feminine and a variety of words that convey this such as genderqueer, genderfluid, and androgynous)

Why?

▶ LGBTQ teens are significantly more likely than their peers to experience victimization, depression, and PTSD

▶ More than half of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey respondents who reported harassment had attempted suicide

▶ Up to 1.6 million young people experience homelessness in the United States every year. 40% of them identify as LGBT; 46% of homeless LGBT youths ran away because of family rejection of their sexual orientation or gender identity; 43% were forced out by parents, and 32% faced physical, emotional or sexual abuse at home. (Williams Institute, 2012)

▶ The suggestions made in <u>Serving Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Teens</u> (Martin and Murdock) are excellent but trans* teens need some different and more specific forms of support than the rest of this population

Scope:

- Physical space
- Social space
- Programming

Physical Space

▸ Are there visual representations of gender variation included in the art? These are two options: https://justseeds.org/product/sylvia-ray-rivera/ http://motha.bigcartel.com/product/motha-promotional-abrodside

▸ Are there informational posters that make it easy to understand the differences between sex, gender, and sexuality? A good example can be found here: https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2017-07/Teaching-Tolerance-Know-the-Difference-Poster-Summer-2015.pdf

▸ Is there signage that makes it clear what a 'safer space' entails?

▸ Are there trans* related resources included in the general community information area? GLAAD's website offers a broad range: https://www.glaad.org/transgender/resources

▸ Are books with trans* characters included in displays (even when it's not a GLBTQ-related display)?

Social Space

▸ Keeping an eye and ear out for gender policing—tricky business, a variety of tactics can be useful depending on the situation

▸ Building relationships with trans* teens—lots of listening (just like with any teen), as few assumptions as possible

▸ Practice! You might not be familiar with how to use every pronoun in conversation, so try it out using something like this chart and mad lib: https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/

Helpful questions:

▸ So you're saying ___? (Repeat back their concerns, questions, and context to make sure you've understood correctly.)

▸ What pronoun do you prefer when we are speaking to one another?

▸ Are you changing your name?

▸ What pronoun and name are you comfortable having me use around your peers?

▸ If your parent/guardian calls, what name and pronoun should I use?

▸ If I visit your school, what name and pronoun should I use?

▸ Is there anyone else I should know that you do not want to be outed to?

Wider questions for further interactions:

▸ Do you want to have individual conversations with my coworkers, do you want me to, or do you not care right now?

▸ What level of assistance, if any, do you want when you tell your peers your new pronoun and/or name?

▸ Do you want my help explaining what being transgender means, or do you want to take it on yourself and ask for help if you need to?

▸ Do you want me to correct your peers when they use an incorrect pronoun or do all the correcting yourself—or to have no correcting at all?

Example questions for a longer-term interaction:

▸ Is it still okay for me to use your old pronoun when I'm talking to your mom?

▸ How did it feel when I stepped in to help you explain to the ten year old at the program that just because you look like a girl doesn't mean you have to be one? Do you want me to do that any differently next time?

▸ Do you want me to keep correcting your boyfriend when he calls you 'she'?

Programming

- Include pronoun preference in the opening questions any time there's a go-around, or make the information explicitly welcome ("What do you need us to know to be able to be comfortable/present here, for example, pronoun preference, if you need to leave early, if you had a terrible day, if you have a headache, etc.)

- Include trans* presenters in teen programming (not necessarily on the topic of gender

Further Considerations

▸ Does your library have a gender neutral bathroom? Resources from ALA that provide support for this can be found here:
https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2015/10/30/libraries-gender-neutral-bathrooms/
http://www.ala.org/rt/sites/ala.org.rt/files/content/professionaltools/bathrooms%20brochure%20for%20printing.pdf

▸ Do your library's card applications require gender as a category? ALA offers this resource as to how this could be addressed sensitively:
http://www.ala.org/rt/sites/ala.org.rt/files/content/professionaltools/trans_inclusive_libcard_forms_for_printing.pdf

▸ Do your local LGBTQ or trans*-specific teen groups know that your library is a safer space?

▸ Do your local LGBTQ or trans*-specific organizations know that you are interested in including hand-outs in your info area?

Bibliography

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If you have any questions, please get in touch!
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