



YOUTH MOVE CHANGE INITIATIVE

What Helps & What Harms
Transgender & Nonbinary Youth
Navigating Mental Health

YOUTH
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Perspectives from Youth with Lived Experience

The following were identified as most harmful for transgender and nonbinary youth in accessing Youth Peer Support (YPS) and mental health services:

1. A prominent binary and heteronormative understanding of gender and attraction in programs
2. Association of LGBTQIA2S+ identities and experiences with trauma and mental health conditions across human services
3. Lack of discussion and visibility of services available, particularly to these communities
4. Lack of Transgender and Nonbinary representation amongst mental health providers (especially within rural communities)
5. Lack of awareness and education on LGBTQIA2S+ topics
6. Lack of transportation (and program support *with* transportation)
7. Uncertainty and fear around acceptance of identities and experiences

The following were identified as best practices in what is most helpful for transgender and nonbinary youth in accessing YPS and mental health services



Being seen and treated as a person with identities and experiences that are valid and important

“Something that helps is being seen as a person, first of all.”

“In rural communities... It's hard to not assume [providers] aren't going to accept you for who you are, because you go through so many providers who you can tell don't support or accept you.”





Transportation resources and support provided by mental health providers

“I feel like **if more support resources offered transportation, there would be a lot more people being able to access these resources.**”

“transportation is a big issue, especially living in an area where public transportation isn't great, **the transit system is super intimidating and confusing to navigate if you've never used it before**”

Normalizing transgender and nonbinary identities and experiences culturally within mental health programs and resources

“I feel like if it was normalized that it's normal to be LGBT, it's like, ‘straight and cis is not the blueprint for everything,’ you know, I feel like if they would say like, **‘these are all the different types of people in the world, it's okay to be these people,’** then it would be easier to find support and do a lot of different things.”

“It could be very valuable to know that I am not alone. **It is very nice for people to be able to empathize with some of my background in difficulties I have faced.** Otherwise, I will agree it can be very hard to be related to and feel understood.”

YPS and mental health providers understanding the impact of their words on the youth they serve

“**Professionals need to realize how much of what they say is going to actually impact us, especially when we're young and just still learning the world.**”

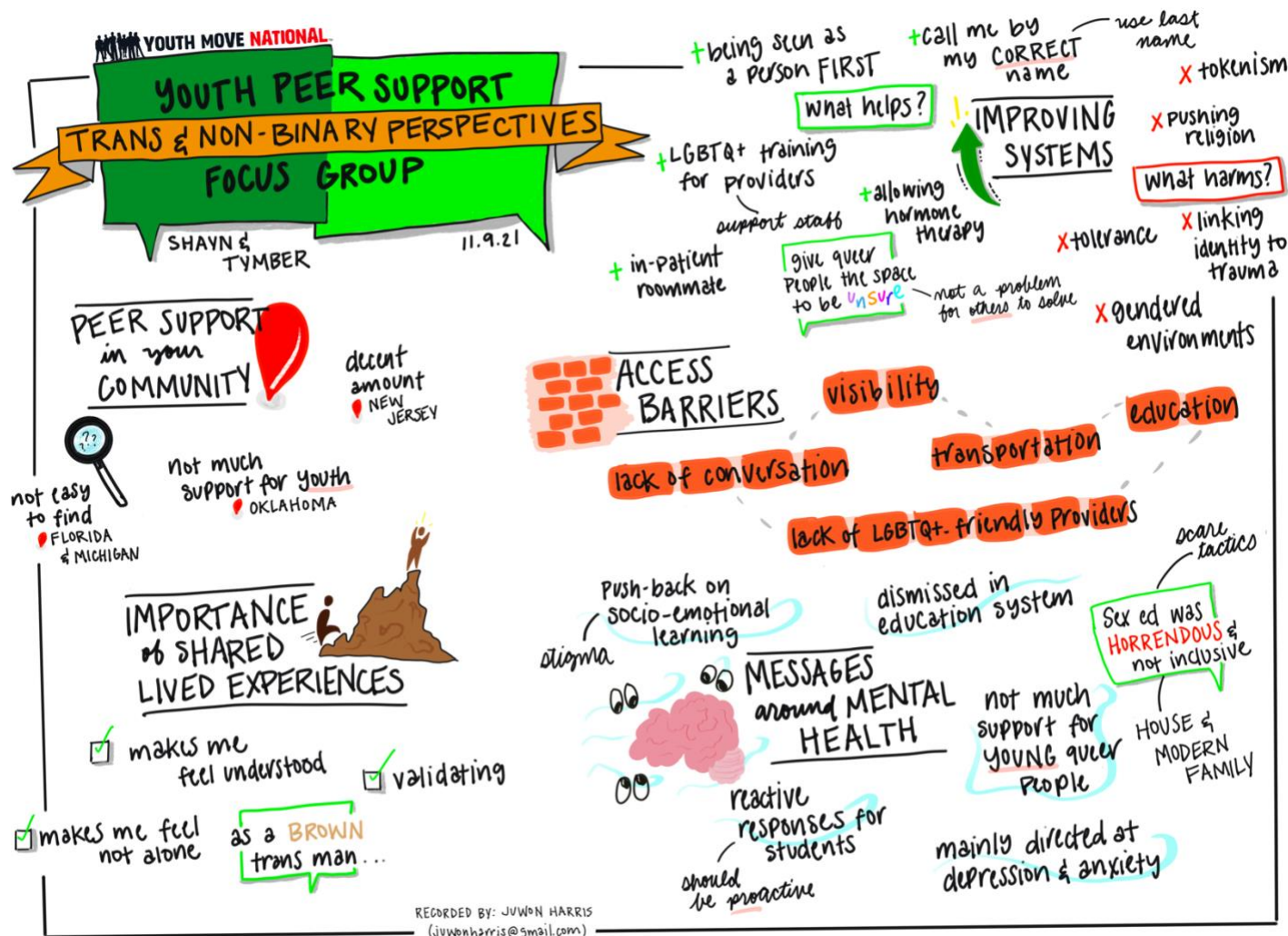
“**I feel like as a brown trans person, I have very different experiences from like, a trans person who's white,** and it can be kind of hard to relate to that. So having similar qualities, I guess, can help a lot like in being supportive for me.”



Mandatory training for mental health providers on LGBTQIA2S+ content

“If I had like a cis het therapist, I would want them to be educated on LGBT issues and trans identities, sexual orientation, all of that, because I feel like, **how are you going to help someone and connect with them if you don't really understand or you're not educated on their issues?**”

“...in mental health, like, **if you're not willing to put in the effort to get to know the patients that you're going to be working with, then you shouldn't be allowed to work with those people.**”





Providing a safe and encouraging space for youth to define and navigate their gender and (a)sexual identities

“Give queer people the space to be unsure... **I think it's important that we're given the space to figure it out, without someone trying to solve the problem, without trying to tell you who you are.**”

“When I was in high school, I was really, really struggling, and a response that I got was like, “Why are you depressed? Your life is fine.” And, you know, looking back now, I realized... **I didn't know that I was gay, because there were like, no gay people around, we didn't have any GSAs, we didn't talk about it. I didn't even know I could be gay, or non binary, or anything.** So I was dealing with that without really knowing it...”

Actively incorporating perspectives and feedback from transgender and nonbinary communities in youth-serving systems, like mental health, is imperative to creating comprehensive and equitable systems change. We must elevate these voices across all youth-serving efforts.

What conversations are you having?

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