

The public school system in the United States continues to prove unsafe for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans*(LGBT) students. In addition, LGBT students in public schools face unique barriers that decrease the likelihood that they will graduate on time. Odyssey Youth Movement (Odyssey) is a youth-led adult supported organization committed to creating, sustaining, and advocating for safe and affirming spaces for LGBT youth. In an attempt to better understand the ways sociodemographic qualifiers such as sexual orientation and gender identity influence a student's likelihood of success in a system as big as Spokane Public Schools, I committed to complete my Children's Studies internship requirement with Odyssey Youth Movement.

Odyssey is a community based organization that has existed in Spokane for more than 20 years. It exists to ensure all LGBT youth feel safe in the spaces and places they encounter in their community. To accomplish this, Odyssey has three programs. The first program is a Health and Wellness program. This program operates in the format of a drop-in center and provides LGBT teens in our community a safe place three days a week to work towards their own health and wellness. The second program is our training and advocacy program. Through this program, Odyssey indirectly reaches the largest number of LGBT youth. It is the mission of Odyssey's training and advocacy program to connect with every youth worker and service provider in eastern Washington to ensure that they not only know best practices when working with LGBT youth but are also capable of implementing them.

Finally, to address the drastically disproportionate on-time graduate rates among LGBT teens, Odyssey directly reaches the most LGBT youth through its Safer Schools Program. At Odyssey, we have learned that several factors contribute to reduced 'on-time graduation rates'.

These factors include a lack of LGBT representation in school curriculum, increased attendance violations as a result of bullying, and a lack of accommodating environments such as bathrooms and locker rooms. At Odyssey, we believe every student should have access to a safe and affirming education. We work with youth leaders to ensure every school has a Gay Straight Alliance, every teacher and administrator has been trained on best practices when working with LGBT youth, and LGBT students in every school are empowered to advocate for issues important to them. When this approach in schools is combined with holistic and high quality programs in the community, we start to see LGBT youth thrive where previously they were failing.

When I started at Odyssey, it was clear that the programs offered to the community were of high quality. What was not clear was the method of measuring success in the community. For my internship, I took it upon myself to ensure Odyssey has sustainable ways of measuring its success in the community.

If Odyssey is going to work to ensure schools are safer for LGBT youth, it must first have a way of taking a quantitative snapshot of the day-to-day experiences of LGBT youth. To accommodate this need I worked with GLSEN and my co-workers to create the School Climate Survey. The School Climate Survey is a quantitative data collection tool designed to measure the quality of school environments as experienced by LGBTQ teens that experience them. In addition to asking basic demographic questions, the survey asks students to rank the frequency of experiences on a scale from “Never” to “Frequently”. The majority of these questions focus on the frequency of and teacher response to homophobic/transphobic actions and statements. In addition, the survey asks questions about attendance, homelessness, and tobacco use.

For my education, I am passionate about comparing local statistics to national and global demographics. It was important to me that the School Climate Survey was designed to align closely with a national survey of the same name released by GLSEN. This allows us to compare our local survey results to national and state based trends.

The creation and administration of this survey was a multi-step process. To create the survey, I studied the past surveys produced and proctored by GLSEN. Then, I worked with our community partners (Spokane Regional Health District & Spokane Public Schools) to ensure that we were asking questions that would symbiotically benefit all three organizations. These conversations lead to the addition of questions regarding tobacco and alcohol use as well as questions about homelessness. In the end, the survey asked 58 questions. The responses to these questions gave us a better understanding of the barriers standing between LGBT youth in Spokane and an on-time graduation. The final step in this survey cycle was to produce an executive summary of the findings to be published and delivered to our community partners, funders, and supporters. This survey is a fundamental part of the future work at Odyssey because it fuels us to make decisions based on the precise circumstances present in our community.

In addition to seeing a snapshot of the barriers facing LGBT youth in Spokane in a particular year, it is important that we understand the complete demographics set of the students in Spokane County. Upon starting my internship, it became clear that the district is not currently collecting data on sexual orientation or gender identity. This data is pertinent to understanding the number of students in our district who may be facing this unique set of barriers. Consequently, the data provided by asking questions about student's sexual orientation and gender identity will allow us to better serve the needs of the students in the schools.

In searching for a solution to this data collection gap, I came across three primary solutions, one of which will be executed in the coming months. First, Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD) distributes a Healthy Youth survey to all students in all District 81 Middle Schools and High Schools. The easiest and most direct route to gathering this data is to work with SRHD to ensure these surveys are appropriately asking questions about student sexual orientation and gender identity. This was the first solution tried and I discovered the survey will not be edited again until 2017. The survey currently offers four options to schools so they can ask exactly the questions they want to ask. Only two of these four options currently ask questions about student's sexual orientation and gender identity. This brings us to our second solution: encourage principals of middle schools and high schools in District 81 to select one of the two surveys that asks these demographic questions. The final and most complex solution involves us creating a data collection tool and distributing it through the schools in our school district. We will spend the next month deciding which solution will best provide the data we need to meet the unique needs of our community.

My data collection focused internship lead me next to outline a longitudinal study to better understand the risk factors LGBT youth experience and how these risk factors present themselves as a student advances through high school. To gather this data, we will partner with Spokane Public Schools (SPS) through the use of their community partner dashboard. The development of this dashboard identified Spokane Public Schools as a frontrunner in the race to share student data with community partners. As an SPS partner, we have access to a dashboard that will outline the exact risk factors identified by the student's school that are likely to prohibit on-time graduation. For example, if a student has three or more unexcused absences in a year,

their account is flagged on the dashboard. The dashboard also tracks disciplinary action and failing grades.

To best utilize the community dashboard, we will invite LGBT freshmen in District 81 to self-select into the case study. Our goal for this study is to have 36 participating LGBT freshmen by the end of this year. The longevity of this study will allow us to see, over the course of four years, what proportion of these students is triggering the Early Warning System built into the community partner dashboard. With this data, we will be able analyze the likelihood that an LGBT youth will graduate on time and, when we conduct this study again, we will be able to precisely measure the quantitative improvements of on-time graduation rates among LGBT youth.

The work we are doing at Odyssey is riddled with challenges. The first and most obvious challenge is the lack of precedent in the work we are doing. While systems like the Community Partner Dashboard and GLSEN's school climate survey are great supplements to the data collection we are starting, the precise work is unprecedented locally and, for the most part, nationally. Because of that, we are starting from the ground level and working our way up. A more demanding challenge is the lack of LGBT comprehension in schools and other systems. This is demonstrated in the Healthy Youth survey proctored by Spokane Regional Health District. Only two of the survey options ask sexual orientation and gender identity questions. These two surveys are also the same two surveys that ask questions about sexual history and sexual activity. This correlation outlines the understanding that the general public has a difficult time separating sexual orientation and gender identity from sexual desire. This is just one

example of the cultural shift we need to see before we can successfully collect the data we need to best serve the LGBT youth in our community.

So far, this internship has supported me in reaching my Children's Studies goals in several ways. First, the opportunity to collect data in several schools has helped me better understand the inner workings of schools and large systems. Second, designing a School Climate Survey that correlates to a national survey has allowed me to interpret nationally collected data in meaningful ways that will guide decision making for the organization in years to come. Finally, the opportunity to design, implement and analyze the results of data collection tools has allowed me to work through a research project from design to executive summary. It is my primary goal to be able to move on from the Children's Studies program with a better understanding of how to collect and interpret data in schools and youth organizations. It is also pertinent to my future research that I am able to focus on a set of local data and interpret it with a national or global mindset. The work I have done through my internship with Odyssey Youth Movement has already moved me towards each of the goals and the experience will support me as I finish my degree and move on to my graduate programs.

At a small non-profit, it is essential to future success that resources are devoted to data driven programs and goal oriented missions. I believe that by collecting snapshot data, longitudinal data, and student demographic data we are taking steps towards better understanding the community we serve. In the end, this data will allow us to more precisely work towards our mission of creating and sustaining safe and affirming spaces for LGBT youth in their community.