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# L I M I T L E S S

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Supporting the development and well-being of LGBTQ  
youth through creative and leadership activities

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Syriah Bailey (2014)

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# WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST

This experience would not have been made possible without the help of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship, awarded to me in February 2014.

I'd like to extend my thanks to friends around the world who kindly offered me beds, sofas and floors to sleep on and lifts to organisations during my time in Canada and the U.S.

Without their help I would not have had the opportunity to travel 10,000 miles by plane, train and car to discover not only creative and leadership projects for LGBTQ youth, but projects that are supporting the development and well-being of young people in inspiring ways.

Where the acronym LGBT is used, organisations have claimed to work with LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) youth rather than LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning) youth.

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# Introduction

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My goal on this journey was to meet with leaders in the fields of creativity, leadership, young people, LGBTQ identities and queer organising. In some cases, where my knowledge was strong enough, I wanted to tutor on projects to get a better understanding about how these projects worked from many sides. I had some key areas to explore:-

- Identify common barriers and needs of LGBTQ youth who take part in projects
- Determine key methods to recruit LGBTQ youth onto projects and maintain their engagement
- Discover ways of including the excluded e.g. transgender, ethnic minority, disabled
- Ascertain funding routes and restrictions
- Explore ways to recognise achievements of LGBTQ youth on projects
- Look at methods to allow them to use their skills to assist with projects in the long-term

Between 2012 and 2014, I worked closely with the Roundhouse (an arts organisation for young people in London) to create a performance piece called “Puffball.” Puffball would work with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and/or Questioning (LGBTQ) youth across the country. With the award winning theatre director, Mark Storer, I travelled as far as Wales documenting the project in which Mark engaged directly with over 80 LGBTQ youth. Of those 80 young people, 10 NEET<sup>1</sup> young people were cast in the show along with 10 professional circus artists who identified as LGBTQ. The result was a 90 minute performance, with a World Premiere in the Roundhouse’s Main Space and a tour to Manchester’s Royal Exchange Theatre (in partnership with Contact Theatre) and Doncaster’s brand new arts venue, Cast.

Leading upto Puffball beginning, I began to educate my colleagues at the Roundhouse about statistics surrounding low self-esteem, self-harm, homelessness and suicide rates of LGBTQ youth and why Puffball had to happen. The journey showed me that the LGBTQ community have a strong sense of self; perhaps because of the negativity they may have experienced from society, they possess a strong sense of resilience.

Puffball was a celebration of individuals who share one connection. Although the production was a success and many people experienced the show and its message, I wondered about the young people we hadn’t been able to engage with and how we could. I thought about my dreams of continuing to do projects like this, for however long there would be a need for it. That’s when the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Traveling Fellowship opportunity came along. After another shortlisting round and interview, I was awarded a five figure U.S. and Canadian Dollar sum to go abroad and learn more.

I chose Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Seattle and Toronto because I believed these cities to have more acceptance and understanding of LGBTQ people as well as a more developed web presence for projects and activities run for youth.

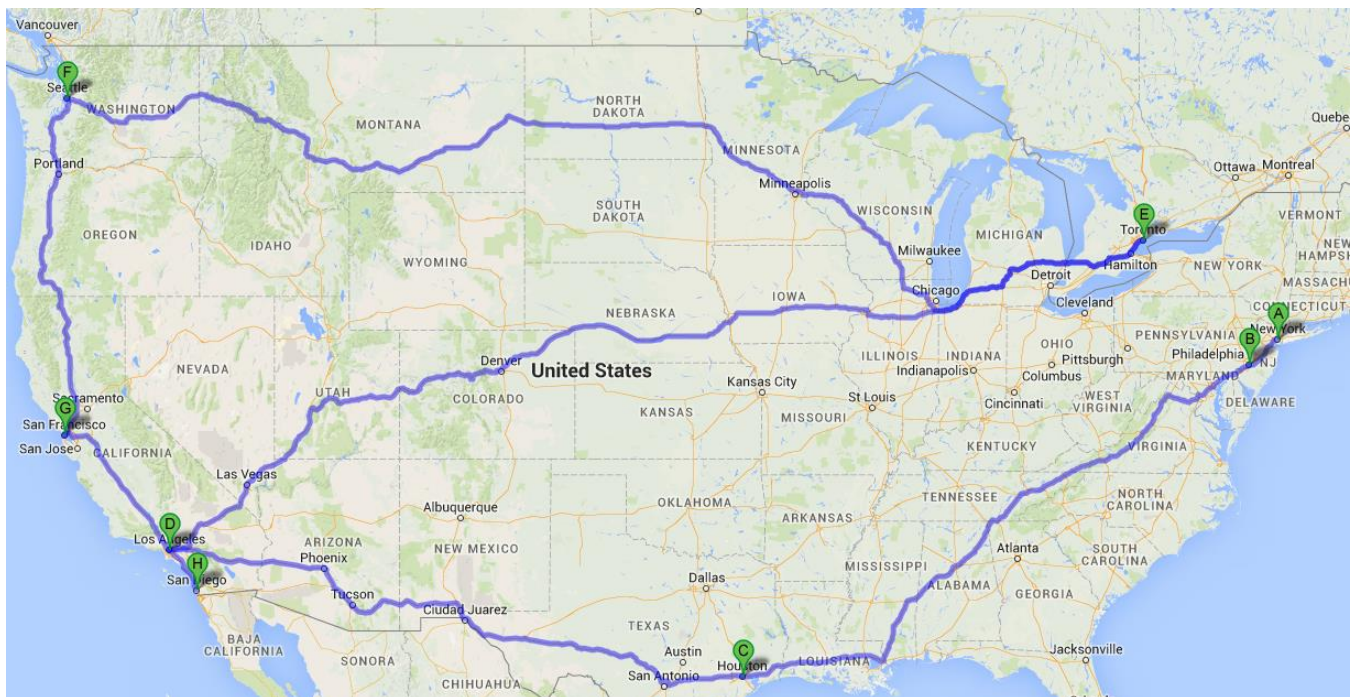
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<sup>1</sup> An acronym for people not engaging in education, employment or training.

I wanted to stay clear of scientific study and rely more on face to face discussion, seeing for myself, collecting case studies and without treating my "subject" like a lab rat<sup>2</sup>. Too many studies have been made on minority groups in this way and whilst they are valuable sources of information, I believed this method would in no way capture their journeys. Being a documentarian, I want you to meet the people I have worked with in the last four months through their own words and stories and through my personal experiences with them, not through numbers, graphs or pie charts.

There are three key themes to look at, especially when it involves anyone's ability to thrive and develop. These are school, home and community – and at any one time, a young person is in the company of one of more of these themes/circles. In each circle, they are at risk of being looked at wrongly or treated negatively due to their sexual orientation, gender identity or presentation. Those environments are risk factors - if we equip youth with protective factors we could enhance their resilience, which may serve to counterbalance risk factors. This report addresses the home, school and community environments as risk factors.

My aim was to explore where it's going well in the community, where there is room for improvement and what can be done to improve on the lives of those people who do not benefit from creative or leadership projects? What can be done for youth who can no longer access school comfortably because of the hatred and bullying they endure as a result of society not being accepting or understanding of their LGBTQ identities? and how can I bring what I learn back to the United Kingdom?



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<sup>2</sup> An animal bred for or used in experiments in laboratories. (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/laboratory>)

In this report, you will follow my journey from New York to California by plane, train and car looking at:

- LGBTQ Youth homelessness in New York
- Alternative and accessible schooling for LGBTQ youth in Toronto
- Performing Arts for LGBTQ youth
- Leadership through Peer Education and Ally Safe Schools
- Mentoring for LGBTQ youth
- Filmmaking and media literacy projects for LGBTQ youth
- Promoting leadership through camping and residential
- Funding projects for LGBTQ youth

One of the main reasons I applied for the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Traveling Fellowship was to look at effectively supporting the development and well-being of LGBTQ youth through creative and leadership projects. However, it's important to look at why LGBTQ youth might need additional support compared to their non-LGBTQ peers. The Human Rights Campaign "Growing Up LGBT" Survey<sup>3</sup> found:-

- 26% of LGBT youth say their biggest problems are not feeling accepted by their family, trouble at school/bullying, and a fear to be out/open, whilst 22% of non-LGBT youth say their biggest problems are trouble with class, exams and grades
- LGBT youth are twice as likely as their peers to say they have been physically assaulted, kicked or shoved at school
- 4 in 10 LGBT youth say the community they live in is not accepting of LGBT people
- 75% of LGBT youth say that most of their peers do not have a problem with their identity as LGBT
- 92% of LGBT youth say they hear negative messages about being LGBT. The top sources are school, the Internet and their peers
- Over three quarters of LGBT youth say they know their situation will get better

It's clear that LGBTQ youth have additional things that worry them compared to non-LGBT youth, but there are also even bigger problems, such as:-

- 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ<sup>4</sup>
- 41% of transgender youth have attempted suicide at least once compared to 4.6% of the overall population.<sup>5</sup>

These statistics are a reminder that there are specific needs that LGBTQ youth have in relation to accessing and engaging with the kind of projects I intend to manage.

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<sup>3</sup> A U.S. survey of more than 10,000 LGBT-identified youth ages 13-17 (<http://www.hrc.org/youth/view-statistics>)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.thetaskforce.org/static\\_html/downloads/reports/reports/HomelessYouth\\_ExecutiveSummary.pdf](http://www.thetaskforce.org/static_html/downloads/reports/reports/HomelessYouth_ExecutiveSummary.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/AFSP-Williams-Suicide-Report-Final.pdf>.

## The Ali Forney Center for Homeless Youth

Background	Outcomes
The Ali Forney Center opened in 2002, named after Ali Forney who was killed in a transphobic attack in New York.	Provides shelter to homeless LGBTQ youth under 21. Also provides services like meals, safe sex information, therapy and writing classes.

I arrived in New York City (NYC) wanting to know about creativity and explore leadership projects in Brooklyn, but came away with the knowledge of a much larger issue that needs to be a priority across the nation - homelessness. In the USA there are 500,000 homeless youth - almost half identify as LGBT. There are only 4,000<sup>6</sup> youth shelter beds in the country and just 350 beds specifically for 200,000 homeless LGBTQ youth a night. After arriving in New York, I came across The Ali Forney Center (AFC) at "No Time for Hate;" a benefit event created by Harlem parent Stacy Parker Le Melle, in response to the violent and homophobic language posted on a ministry sign on Lenox Avenue and 123rd Street<sup>7</sup>. The event hosted panel discussions, performances and a raffle and all proceeds went to The Ali Forney Center (AFC); a Harlem-based nonprofit that serves LGBTQ homeless youth.

Before becoming the Executive Director of AFC, Carl Siciliano worked with homeless youth in New York for over 20 years. One homeless youth Carl Siciliano worked with was a young man called Ali Forney. Ali was a gender non-conforming<sup>8</sup> young person who was beaten up at school for being effeminate. His mother was addicted to drugs and struggled to understand his identity, so Ali was entered into the care system at aged 13. Around that time, there were no homes for LGBTQ youth so Ali was subjected to abuse and beaten up by foster children in the homes he stayed in as a foster child. By the age of 16, Ali had run away from 15 different foster care homes and was on the streets. He accessed the homeless shelter Carl Siciliano worked at, getting shelter and having basic needs met. However, in 1997, Ali was murdered in Harlem. He was 22 years old. Two of his close friends, Kiki Freeman and Dione Wester (also two gender non-conforming people) were murdered before this and Ali had helped police with both cases, but they were never solved. As a result, The Ali Forney Center opened in 2002. When the AFC opened in Harlem it was important because the community opened up their arms to the center and showed love and support, so the "No Time For Hate," event was incredibly important in terms of solidarity.

What's more, AFC provides the largest and most comprehensive program in the nation dedicated to meeting the needs of homeless LGBTQ youth. Right now, there is no dedicated home like environment shelter for over 21s like what AFC provide in NYC.

In 2013 AFC provided over 100,000 meals to homeless LGBTQ youth. On an average night there are over 220 homeless LGBTQ youth on their waiting list in need of shelter and they had over 2,700 encounters that year through their outreach workers who work to identify homeless

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<sup>6</sup> <http://nationalhomeless.org/campaigns/national-campaign-youth-shelter/>

<sup>7</sup> The "No Time for Hate" fundraising website (<http://harlemagainstviolencehomophobia.mydagsite.com/home>)

<sup>8</sup> Ali presented as male for a part of the day and female for another part of the day.



LGBTQ youth on the streets and offer them clothing, meals, safer sex kits and referral to services. AFC offered 1,056 therapy sessions last year, provided at their drop in and provided 45 groups every week on safer sex, community resources, substance education, art therapy and performance. They have a dedicated learning lab donated by Time Warner Cable for young people to look for work, socially network (e.g. to let their family know they're okay).

Today, AFC offer groups and workshops from sexual health to creative writing. They hold a clinic twice a week where a doctor comes in and provides free HIV primary medical care on site. Individual counselling is also available at AFC. What's more, AFC is Open 7 days a week for young people to just come in, hang out and be themselves.

The center essentially takes care of the city's homeless young people, so it's no surprise that the \$13,350<sup>9</sup> raised at the "No Time for Hate" event went completely to them. "No Time for Hate" featured a panel discussion on youth homelessness from the likes of Carl Siciliano (Executive Director of The Ali Forney Center,) Elegance Bratton (Filmmaker,) Max S. Gordon (Creator of The New Civil Rights Movement,) Romaine Patterson (American LGBT Rights Activist and Radio Presenter,) Derek Hartley (Presenter of Radio show Derek and Romaine on Sirius XM Radio,) and Rev. Yunus Coldman (a local Reverend) and you can read a blog post about it here<sup>10</sup>, but here is an important quote I took away with me that night:

*"When I think about the terrible suffering of so many hundreds of thousands of LGBT youth in this country who have been thrown out their homes and made to suffer in the streets, I think of child sacrifice. There's not so much stoning going on in our times. Not directly anyway. But one of the terrible sins that was dealt with in the Old Testament was this tendency for parents to sacrifice their children on alters, on notion that god was this viscous cruel god - that you had to appease his rage and anger by sacrificing your children. We don't sacrifice children on alters anymore, we sacrifice them onto the streets." - Carl Siciliano*

In 2014, the Mayor of New York added 100 new beds for homeless youth in shelters per night - 24 of which were specifically for LGBTQ youth, but there needs to be more of a change. In London, an equivalent organisation to The Ali Forney Center is the Albert Kennedy Trust (AKT,) who support homeless LGBTQ youth under 25 in getting off the streets and improving their lives through services like Supper Club. AKT officially became an organisation in 1990 and has therefore been operating for a longer period than AFC, which opened in 2004.

**It's clear that AFC works with many youth throughout any one year. Their inclusion of the excluded is clear too – working with LGBTQ youth specifically. Much of their funding is in kind, e.g. the computers donated by Time Warner and the outreach team work long hours reaching out to the homeless youth on the streets and letting them know the service is there. AFC's main struggle is to do with the amount of young people they are able to help.**

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<sup>9</sup> Equivalent to £8,350

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.syriahbailey.com/2014/06/no-time-for-hate/>



# Triangle Program: Canada's Only LGBTQ High School

Background	Outcomes
Opened in 1995 and operating from the basement of a church, funded by Pride Remembrance Run <sup>11</sup> , TELUS <sup>12</sup> , banks and supported by the local community.	Youth, aged under 21, attend a welcoming and inclusive school full time to study a curriculum and learn LGBTQ history. Youth fed breakfast and lunch daily.

Finding out about Triangle Program was an exciting time for me. I had heard about the program through a search online and quickly emailed them. It took a while for a reply, which I am not surprised by - the school consists of two busy full time teachers, one of which is Jeffrey White. On a hot summers day I met with Jeffrey in the basement of Toronto Metropolitan Church. Triangle Program; Canada's only LGBTQ high school operates rent free from the church and takes in roughly 30 LGBTQ youth each year.

Launched in 1995 to reconnect youth to school, Triangle Program offer programs for aged 13 to 17, have guest facilitators, teach the history of LGBTQ and provided resources to LGBTQ youth up to 21 (their last year of high school.) In its first year, Triangle Program had 24 admissions. Now, their intakes range from 18 to 45 students per year.

Jeffrey notes that the majority of its first students were white cisgender<sup>13</sup> lesbian and gay youth. But now, there are more ethnically diverse and gender variant youth attending the school. Students are also getting younger - they receive calls regarding youth in grade 8 (13 years old) about admission to the school.

There are two full time dedicated teaches in the school including Jeffrey, one social worker, one youth counsellor and one ternary resource teacher<sup>14</sup>. I asked about whether they have ever had to turn anyone away - Jeffrey said they only turn away big special needs cases (that's in relation to support they can't offer due to funding.)

The Triangle Program is funded by Pride Remembrance Run, the owners of a local business who would prefer to remain anonymous, TELUS and banks. They have roughly \$100 per

## TRIANGLE PROGRAM STUDENT

"I came to TTP because I was getting bullied and harassed at school. I stopped attending school altogether and was struggling to find out who I really was. My teacher said why don't you go here. I was like woah I didn't know it existed! I didn't feel like I was going to get anywhere or amount to anything. I felt like the chaos was just going to get worse. The Triangle Program is all inclusive. When I needed something that wasn't to do with my education they helped me find the support I needed and made adjustments about the way I learn."

<sup>11</sup> Pride Remembrance Run is a yearly charity run where the proceeds/pledges go to selected community charities.

<sup>12</sup> TELUS provides Wireless and Internet services across Canada, along with TV and Home Phone services in western Canada.

<sup>13</sup> Denoting or relating to a person whose self-identity conforms with the gender that corresponds to their biological sex; not transgender (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/cisgender>)

<sup>14</sup> Ternary Resource Teachers work closely with students who have special or additional needs.

student per academic year and this has included expenditure on books, but the Metropolitan Community Church provides the space for free and they get donations. For a year, the school has to raise \$40,000 to run.

They recruit via word of mouth from youth and current students / alumni. In addition to this, they offer a Nutritional Program due to lack of parental support and financial stability for some youth. Some also live alone so Triangle Program offer a breakfast and lunch program which takes on volunteer cooks from the community church. This costs half of their yearly budget to run but is essential for many youth. The school is largely community based, supported by volunteers and the local church.

This year, Pride Prom was a partnership between Triangle Program, SOY and Buddies in Bad Times Theatre (the longest running queer theatre, programming queer performance and artists programs.) 298 young people attended Pride Prom from the Greater Toronto Area (all aged under 21). They had access to finger foods, could wear what they wanted and could visit safer sex stalls and harm reduction awareness stalls available throughout the night for the ticket price of \$20. For Triangle Program's yearly Prom, the award for Prom Queen and Prom Queen take place. In addition to this, they have an award for Prom Ace; an award with the same prestige as Prom Queen/King but for someone who may not want to be identified with a particular gender, which I found really refreshing.

Whilst Triangle Program is the only LGBTQ high school in Canada, there have been similar set ups around North America. For example, in 2005, the Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy opened – their mission is to “empower student learning by teaching awareness, acceptance and non-violence, celebrating our diversity, achieving academic excellence, and fostering strong family-school-community connections. At Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy, you will be encouraged to become an active participant in your child's educational journey.”

A strong persistent experience amongst LGBTQ youth is bullying. Alternative academic services like The Triangle Program strive to offer education to LGBTQ youth who are otherwise unable to attend school. The young people I came across were unable to attend school for various reasons but one clear reason was the bullying and harassment they faced at school due to societies response to their sexual orientation, gender identity or presentation. The Triangle Program was a great example of inclusive schools for LGBTQ youth, yet they existed because some LGBTQ youth do not feel welcome within the mainstream education system. Whilst it's easy to say alternative schooling is an option, it's vital that schools ensure they are inclusive of young people from all walks of life - this is where the UK based organisation Diversity Role Models comes in. They take ordinary everyday people who happen to be LGBTQ and successful in their line of work and train them to go into schools and talk about themselves. Through this, young people are more aware of LGBTQ identities and that, ultimately, we are all the same.

**The need for education is huge in these young people and they have a right to an education. Students are generally recruited through referrals from local agencies and schools. Jeffrey noted the demographic has diversified since TTP first opened, particularly around ethnic and gender identity. TELUS, private donors and the donated space in the church's basement as well as volunteers from the local community keep TTP's running costs low. TTP operates as a school; young people graduate with a qualification. However, one way TTP allows for young people to feel recognised and to celebrate their achievements is by the implementation of Prom.**

## Fruit Loopz Art Mentoring ProjEct (FLAME)

Background	Outcomes
Programs run by Supporting Our Youth (SOY). SOY opened in 1998 due to no LGBTQ youth services within Toronto Youth Services. FLAME launched as a performing arts project. Shortly after, extended as a mentoring strand for participants.	“There is an agreed understanding on taking part in the program that we are working towards creating safer spaces and artistic support as we build healthy, interactive and respectful relationships with others and ourselves.”

In 2013, SOY worked with 12,376 young people. The total number of LGBTQ people accessing Sherbourne Health Centre (where SOY is based) was 31,204 - they accessed the LGBT Clinical Team, Mental health/counselling, SOY and the Parenting Network mostly.

There are 16 years under SOYs belt and although they are one of Torontos leading services for LGBTQ youth, they began at Toronto Youth Services as there was no service for LGBTQ youth at the time. The funding covered part time staff, but Beverly (the founder of SOY) fundraised and paid staff as there was no core funding. As the years progressed, they moved to a space at Sherbourne Health Centre and now occupy the second floor, which is solely for LGBTQ people. The organisation is essentially a collection of minority groups within a minority group and so SOY became specialist and grew.

SOYs first projects were the Rainbow Book Club and FLAME (a performing arts project), which is still running. FLAME is a yearly project at SOY, which began being ran by one staff member. This year, it was run by two people - King, who works with the youth and coordinates performances, and Sonny, who deals with volunteers and community partnerships.

SOY seemed to be a really active and busy organisation doing wonderful things with and for young people, particularly around Pride time where large scale events took place on the Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Young people are truly at the heart of what they do, however, one of the issues they had was maintaining engagement, particularly with regard to FLAME as the years went by and the model remained the same. Similarly, maintaining relationships with partner organisations was tricky, but they maintained strong relationships with organisations such as:- Griffin Centre, Delisle Youth Services, Youthline, Planned Parenthood, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, Arts Gallery of Toronto, Sketch and Rainbow Alliance for the Deaf.

The organisation has recently been awarded \$50,000 for a brand new website, which is exciting news. One problem the organisation has noted is that they do not have a dedicated communications officer to promote the projects, they all promote their separate projects in their spare time.

Fruit Loopz Art Mentoring ProjEct (F.L.A.M.E.) was born from Fruit Loopz (a performing arts program,) when the organisation realised there was a gap in the project and more could be done to support the young people who took part in FLAME.

FLAME's efforts in recruitment rely mostly on word of mouth from young people who have taken part. Engaging youth takes energy and people become tired and less interested, however, SOY says their programs are at their best when youth driven. In addition to this, there are lots more in the city of Toronto in relation to arts for LGBTQ youth, so there is less dedicated interest in FLAME. This is how the collaborative stage at Pride was born (the young people involved in FLAME performed on the Fruit Loopz stage at World Pride (this stage was in the family area.)

SOY evaluates projects twice a year. They tend to have a student studying social work conduct a qualitative and quantitative study around the support they provide around housing and employment.

SOY's youth programming also relies on young people saying what they'd like via online surveys. Sonny says they have to rethink on the fly a lot for short term projects like six week projects, which is often a challenge for specific funding. In addition to this, with funding they find that it's a money vs programming issue, for example, applying for lots of money and not knowing what to do with it rather than applying for the amount you need and knowing exactly where you are going to spend it.

When FLAME was launched, SOY consulted the youth council (which consists of six youth) on decisions such as the logo and tumblr page. Young people were paid for their time. The first block consisted of two artist mentors doing many things. The second block was based on what was popular and consisted of one youth artist facilitator and one artist facilitator.

In terms of outreach for FLAME, Sonny noted that more people saw their outreach efforts on Facebook than anywhere else. They have American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters for FLAME, but non-deaf people still access the program. There is no saying that having deaf tutors means it'll just be deaf people attending but it is also important to acknowledge SOY are aware that white cisgender people access spaces first due to privilege via class, gender and ethnicity. With that said, youth are more likely to go to workshops where they feel represented or see

## AMY, SOY YOUTH

"I first heard about SOY in 2012 through the Social Worker at my high school. They had found SOY online and thought it could help me. I didn't know what to expect, but I decided to give it a try. At that time my life was full of bad news. My parents were not supportive and Children's Aid was involved. I was feeling suicidal. I had a family doctor, but I found him intimidating.

I went to Trans\_Fusion Crew and it was pretty much a whole different world. We could talk freely about what was going on with our lives, and our bodies. The people were so open about things, and just seemed to get me. I got referred to a trans-positive doctor at Sherbourne and found a place of my own. I'm finishing high school now and I have been accepted to do a computer course at college. I have a summer job with a transit company, which is great because my dream job is to be a Bus Driver!

SOY is a big part of my life now. It is a bit of both family and community for me. I volunteered at the FLAME stage at Pride last year, welcoming people to the event and handing out water. I have made actual friends here. If someone was in the situation I was in two years ago and didn't know what to do, I would very much recommend SOY to them.

themselves represented and see each other in the space, which is an additional reason why they appoint deaf people to tutor on projects. For Toronto specifically, diversifying is an issue because there is a lack of aboriginal staff – for example, at the time of writing this report, SOY had one aboriginal staff member.<sup>15</sup>

FLAME collect feedback through forms and talk to youth after every session for ongoing feedback; the youth council check in with people at the end of each session. Essentially, they evaluate as they go along rather than an intensive evaluation process at the end. FLAME is funded by Toronto Arts Council and TELUS – the specific funding goes towards ASL interpreters, youth artists, adults artists. It costs \$30k to run the project each year. In order to meet the needs of funders SOY send reviews to funders. If they don't spend enough money or it isn't accounted for in the right way, the funder can sometimes take money away. FLAME is one of SOYs only projects to rely on specific/allocated funding and its clear needs have to be met to retain the funding.

In Toronto, I noticed that SOY had a variety of groups including the “Black Queer Youth” group and three transgender youth groups; these groups were run by people who identified as the respective race, gender and sexualities. SOY also applied for funding to make FLAME inclusive of deaf people and hired deaf facilitators and American Sign Language interpreters.

Through FLAME, SOY are building relationships with local organisations and venues in order to provide more space for youth to make art and gain skills next year. SOY noted a problem they said they had was the idea of community vs. art. The idea of concentrating more on identity without art vs. making art without the identity themes and discussions.

Last year, FLAME took a risk and added a different dimension; they held self-care workshops and stalls around awareness as a reflection of Pride. This went well for them. SOY are extremely transparent in their outcomes, they are the first to say they are learning from trial and error and taking risks - as a fairly large organisation in Toronto, they definitely can.

**Whilst SOY were brilliant at recruitment via word of mouth, SOYs struggle was maintaining this engagement. They are a collection of minority groups within a minority group, including trans groups, ethnic minority groups and groups for newcomers to Toronto. SOY were transparent in their funding; \$30k is awarded to them to spend on ASL interpreters and the operation of FLAME. Fruit Loopz world pride stage is a way to reward and recognise young peoples achievements and FLAME was set up as a progression route from Fruit Loopz.**

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<sup>15</sup> While aboriginals comprise only 2% of Ontarios (the state in which Toronto is located) population, Ontario has the largest aboriginal population of any province or territory.  
(<http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=dbe867b42d853410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD&vgnextchannel=57a12cc817453410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>)

## H.E.A.T: Leadership through Peer Education

Background	Outcomes
Set up as a progression route exclusively youth accessing SOY's programs.	Training in oppression and privilege around youth identities. Opportunities to join the Speakers Bureau.

H.E.A.T. is a peer education program that tackles the problem of putting yourself in vulnerable positions as an activist or advocate for LGBTQ people. John, who set up the project knows "Peer Education is valuable," and this is why he created the Human Rights Equity Access Team (H.E.A.T). John has worked with SOY since 2009, as a student supporting the drop in sessions. He now manages H.E.A.T.

H.E.A.T. is a 21 week programme where youth learn about public speaking on topics like race, gender, class, disability from a youth perspective. Their "curriculum" is taken from "Stay Solid: A Radical Handbook for Youth," a guide for youth written by youth that covers a range of topics to do with identity. The group learn about anti-oppression and privilege during the course of 21 weeks with the aim of joining the Speakers Bureau.

SOY notes that one problem with Peer Education is that anti oppression training is a must and is often not included in any kind of public speaking training. People who have been supported by an organisation often feel obligated to take part in talks where they are at the forefront of questions to payback the organisations who have supported them. This can be when oppressive questions from strangers come into play - how do young people answer or deflect these questions? This is what H.E.A.T. teaches.

The money accessible by H.E.A.T. is not core<sup>16</sup> SOY funding – the program is funded by unions and banks in Toronto, totalling to about \$50,000. Many of SOY's programs aren't moulded to meet the requirements of funding pots, however H.E.A.T. is an exception.

Although H.E.A.T. has a relatively high fund to work with, once young people complete each topic in "Stay Solid," they are paid an honorarium<sup>17</sup> then once young people graduate from the program and progress onto The Speakers Bureau where they join the pool of public speakers who handle requests from media to talk with youth. Every appearance gets an honorarium (\$40 upward, which is often covered by the requesting organization.) The young people also facilitate workshops.

In terms of the mix of youth involved in H.E.A.T., the outreach is only within SOY, which utilises the youth already accessing their services and provides a progression route within the org. The group is diverse, many of the young people identify as female but there is a mix of people from ethnic minorities and trans youth. Many of the group are over 20 and there are currently just three teens involved in the program.

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<sup>16</sup> Money that goes to staff, building costs, programs on a yearly basis – for the core activities of an organisation.

<sup>17</sup> An honorarium is a payment made to a person for their services in a volunteer capacity or for services for which fees are not traditionally required. For example, the payment to guests speaker at a conference to cover their travel, accommodation or preparation time.



In order to ensure the program is running smoothly, the group have daily check outs and a program evaluation, which asks about the dynamics of the team, the facilitation of the program and ultimately what they are learning. They also meet with older participants / alumni to track their progress beyond the program.

HEAT was an example of truly training young people already involved in SOY to peer educate and public speak confidently, with conviction. Additionally, the range of young people engaged in the program and topics they covered exemplified SOYs efforts to be diverse and inclusive. Young people graduate to the speakers' bureau once all modules are complete and further progression routes were in the form of paid talks, which the young team managed.



## Ally Safe Schools: Peer Education

Background	Outcomes
Ally Safe Schools was started in 1997 as a program to provide educational training for faculty and administrators working with youth. It evolved into an Out of School Time (OST) program for youth in addition to providing professional development training.	Youth work with staff on building a deeper awareness of concepts related to sexual orientation and gender identity. They run workshops in schools and conferences.

Ally Safe Schools is a similar program to H.E.A.T. and an example of what an outcome can look like – they are based in Philadelphia. Instead of public speaking, they run workshops in teams. Something I wanted to highlight was a workshop I attended facilitated by young people from Ally Safe Schools. The workshop was titled “Multiple Offences: Microaggressions<sup>18</sup> from a youth perspective” and looked at young people’s perspectives when it came to feeling belittled by adults.

Although all participants and facilitators spoke openly about the idea of microaggression, it was agreed that there had to be a line drawn in terms of what is a microaggression and what is someone just caring for your well-being.

### ALEX, ALLY SAFE SCHOOLS PEER EDUCATOR

I'm an 18 year old student in Philadelphia and a member of the transgender community. Before joining Ally Safe Schools, I was interning at the Attic Youth Center on an arts project. I come from a middle class, very religious family. I heard about Ally Safe Schools through my partner, who was interning there. What made me want to join was knowing I could make a difference in someone’s life. Ally Safe Schools would go to schools and help them perfect their GSA’s. We go to schools and do workshops for students and staff about how to be LGBTQ inclusive, gender inclusive and recognise bullying.

By being in the program I broke out of my shyness, I used to always keep to myself and be very quiet, but a few months into the program that all changed. I have more confidence and I love public speaking. Ally Safe Schools is more accepting and diverse than non LGBTQ spaces. I thought being the only trans member would be nerve racking but it's perfectly fine, everyone is so cool with it and I feel safe. I am also not the only person of colour. I feel that my achievements are recognised, because if I ever needed to talk about anything I can come to the board.

After the program I plan to get as involved on my college campus and bring what I learned at Ally Safe Schools to college. Everyday skills that Ally Safe Schools has taught me are to always take charge and always express my feelings to other people. I graduated from Mastery Charter School and will be attending Indiana university of Pennsylvania studying psychology.

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<sup>18</sup> A microaggression is a small remark or statement with harmful or discriminatory implications.

How we navigate finding that line is tricky. And that's why we should talk openly to each other - youth come from a place of not knowing and are therefore treated as kids and, unfortunately, adults can't make things better for them without the input of youth voices.

**Ally Safe Schools essentially give students a voice. They are trained to run workshops across Philadelphia (and occasionally across the country). They recruited Alex through word of mouth. Their workshops seemed largely from a youth perspective.**

## Click Mentoring Programme

Background	Outcomes
Launched in 2000 as a result of the recognition of divide between the younger and older generations. A working group met for two years and conducted focus groups.	Young people are paired with mentors to spend time together and potentially support their development and well-being.

In 2000, SOY realised there was a fear in the community in regards to ageism from young people. They set up Click in order to link older and younger LGBTQ people. Click began as a housing mentoring scheme but it became problematic. In the early stages of the Mentoring Programme, they held workshops for mentors around being queer now vs. then, crisis resources and trans youth 101 to be equipped with the correct knowledge and awareness.

Now, they recruit through Xtra! Magazine (an arts and events magazine aimed at the LGBTQ community in Toronto) and hold orientations open to anyone wishing to find out more about becoming a mentor. The age range of current mentors is 26-60 and the average mentor age is 30-40, whilst most youth are 19-23. The youngest mentee was a 13.5 year old transgender boy who described his mentor as "epic." 14 is the youngest allowed mentee, however if a parent calls to arrange they are able to accept younger youth. On the odd occasion a mentee will be too much for a mentor to handle (mental health, behaviour, attachment, etc) and so they are referred to counsellors as the need is immediate. Leslie, the Click Mentoring Programme Manager, notes youth with disabilities are difficult to match. The programme is more like a big sister, big brother programme.

All mentors are volunteers, they are neither paid nor given funds to spend time or pay for activities with youth (unless under any special circumstances). They must first apply via an application form, they are then interviewed in their homes, SOY obtains work references, doctors checks and police checks. They are asked about who they feel they'll be the best match for and honest about what they want from the relationship. What is their purpose for doing this? This way SOY gets a good sense of the person.

For mentees, they apply and meet at SOY's offices. Sometimes the waiting time to be matched can be quite long because Lesley wants to make sure it's a worthwhile match and not an ASAP match. Once a match has been made, the two parties meet at SOY offices. They exchange why they're there and Lesley explains why they are a match. Many matches are made based on the need of the mentee and experience and values of the mentor. Identities that connect and reflect the pair are also taken into consideration. If both parties are happy with the match, they have a match agreement, which outlines how often they meet, how they stay in touch and that they update Lesley once a month on any issues or progress.

Volunteer mentors must be over 26 and there is a 7 year minimum age difference for each match. There is a spectrum of cultural diversity and the pool of mentors is a lot more diverse compared to when they began when it consisted mostly of white gay men. Through a partnership with a local cinema, each mentor/mentee match gets two free movie tickets.

## NICOLE, CLICK MENTORING PARTICIPANT

I'm Nicole, I'm 17 years old. I found out about SOY almost exactly a year ago, and it's probably the best discovery I've ever made. My dad and I were looking for some support systems for me in the LGBTQ community, and simply through google searches, we found SOY. At first, I didn't even consider looking into the mentoring program at all. The idea made me nervous, and I couldn't wrap my mind around the fact that one person would want to volunteer their time with me just to hang out and be supportive to me. Still skeptical about the whole idea, my dad kept encouraging me to give it a try. We arranged an appointment to meet with Leslie. The interview took about a couple of hours, and once it was over, Leslie said she had the perfect mentor for me. She explained how she thought we might be a good match because we both had the same interests, and right then and there, she gave this mystery match a call. Em answered the phone after a couple of rings, and Leslie explained to her that she had just had an interview with me, and she thought we could be a good mentoring pair. Leslie hung up, and told me Em was really happy to finally be paired with a youth. I figured, oh Leslie's just saying that to make me feel better. We then arranged a date so that me and Em could meet face to face, and see how well or if we could get along.

The meeting day finally came along. My dad and I came early to SOY, and this made me nervous because I was worried my mentor-to-be would see me without knowing I was their youth, and think badly of me. I don't even remember what Em and I talked about once we were in the meeting room alone together, I was so nervous. But I do remember leaving thinking, "wow, maybe someone really does care." Em seemed super nice, and I was still so surprised that Leslie had matched us so well based solely on a couple hours worth of talking. The first time Em and I hung out, we went to this Board game cafe. Em taught me how to take the subway. She was so easy to talk to. I still couldn't believe all this was happening. I was able to quickly adjust to Em because she seemed to quickly adjust to me, which made everything a lot easier (because usually I take a really long time to warm up to people). She taught me how to play cribbage, and for the first round that we played, she didn't even go easy on me. We both laughed, and she apologized for being super competitive.

A year has passed since Em and I first met, and I still can't believe she hasn't gotten bored of me. Em is honestly the best friend and support I've ever had, and who would have thought we would meet under these circumstances? I feel like now when we hang out, it's not because we feel like we have to, but it's because we want to. Em makes this outstanding effort to hang out with me at least once a week, and I couldn't be more grateful for her. From the beginning, all I ever needed was for someone to accept me for who I am, and Em has gone above and beyond that by welcoming me into her life in all aspects. Probably without even realizing she's doing it, Em has given me a great sense of community just by doing simple things like inviting me to hang out with her and her girlfriend. Even her parents who live in Ottawa (and whom I've never met) are accepting of me, and they've invited me to hang out at their cottage. I usually refer to her as my big sister, she's honestly become like family to me.

In order to monitor the programme, each mentor/mentee pair is sent a quarterly update as well as an annual match review. Each pairing is unique and people get to navigate it how they choose. To award participants, there is always a holiday party and a pride party.

**CLICK was created because of a need for older, more experienced and open minded mentors / role models for the young people attending SOY. The process to become a mentor was very organised and referrals for mentors came from partner organisations working with LGBTQ young people. CLICK aims to tackle and lower the risk of young people being excluded and disengaged. The funding received for CLICK goes towards paying Lesley's salary, which is a role that requires a lot of attention to details with each applicant (mentor and mentee). All activity between the mentor and mentee is voluntary, mentors do not get paid and to keep track of how each party is getting on, each match has monthly feedback opportunities.**

## Reel Queer Youth

Background	Outcomes
Reel Queer Youth is a one week video production and media literacy training for LGBTQ youth and their allies ages 13-20. Founded in 2008, in partnership with Reel Grrls.	“Use professional camera and editing equipment to express yourself in a safe, open, and fun environment with a team of professional filmmakers and mentors. Working in small groups, you will complete a short film.”

My role on Reel Queer Youth was that of a Mentor; I taught young people how to operate filmmaking equipment and taught a 101 workshop on video editing and assisted a group of youth to create a short film. We began each morning with a Preferred Gender Pronoun (PGP)<sup>19</sup> game and something I found refreshing was the Media Literacy element of the program, which we covered on the first and second day of a week long process. Media Literacy consisted of the group watching clips from films that represented LGBTQ people and the group discussing what the scenes denote and connote. It was a fun process and real eye opener for how young people see themselves represented in the media.

Some participants came as far as Portland (a three hour drive away) to be with us every day that week, one parent volunteered her time to set up and distribute lunch to us (which was catered for free from local businesses.)

Participants pay a fee for the project but there is also a sliding scale payment scheme and some are able to take part at no cost. So young people are never turned away due to funds.

What this project did lack was youth support. All youth engagement projects I have worked on in the UK have had at least one dedicated youth support worker to tackle any issues that arise amongst youth who are NEET. They are especially trained and experienced in things like managing conflict and facilitating games, etc. I noticed that Reel Queer Youth did not have this, but I also noticed that the "type" of youth Reel Queer Youth was engaging with were not at risk in that sense. In fact, the only thing that was problematic for some of the youth was their gender identity and the acceptance and understanding they wanted from their parents and guardians.

What better way to feel accepted than to be in a room full of queer and queer friendly mentors, where we can have conversations about things such as privilege and gender and sexuality and be listened to and acknowledged? My whole experience was positive and I felt welcome at every moment. I believe this to be a similar story for the youth involved as this year saw two participants returning as mentors.

Reel Queer Youth evaluated their program through an online survey at the end of the project, which young people could do anonymously. Each day, there were also check ins with the groups to ensure any problems were addressed. Seeing this first hand, as well as personally facilitating morning welcome discussions was clearly beneficial as this gave young people a chance to ask questions and feedback on.

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<sup>19</sup> We go around the room stating our preferred name and our preferred pronoun (e.g. he, she, they, zhe.)

Reel Queer Youth is part of Reel Grrls but the funding is mostly from Three Dollar Bill Cinema (who program Seattle's Lesbian and Gay Film Festival.) Participants (13-21) are fed for breakfast and lunch daily, which is provided free of charge by local (some queer owned and run) companies who offer a range of healthy foods including gluten free, vegetarian and vegan options.

Whilst Reel Queer Youth was funded and run by Three Dollar Bill Cinema, they were also supported by Reel Grrls. This may have given the program more notoriety amongst people who had already taken part in a range of Reel Grrls programs and the costs of the program were allocated unrestricted.

#### DANNY, REEL QUEER YOUTH PROGRAM MANAGER

My name is Danny Tayara. I'm 21 years old and I work at Three Dollar Bill Cinema as the Programming Coordinator and Reel Queer Youth Manager.

When I was in high school, I started going to Camp Ten Trees; a summer camp in Washington for LGBTQ youth and youth of non-traditional families. I met a counsellor at camp who found out I wanted to grow up to be an animator at Pixar. They told me I should sign up for Reel Queer Youth, a program they had co-founded and were managing at the time. I signed up for Reel Queer Youth, went through the program, and did it again the following year. After my first year at RQY, the Programming Director of Three Dollar Bill Cinema, Jason Plourde, invited me to be on the jury of the Seattle Lesbian & Gay Film Festival. As I was in the midst of the Reel Grrls Thesis program, and transitioning from participant to mentor at RQY, Reid told me that Jason was considering asking me to be his assistant. A couple weeks later, I got an official email from Jason with an outline for a position as Three Dollar Bill Cinema Programming Assistant with a small honorarium. I was the Programming Assistant for two years, my second year taking over the lead position in the festival screening committee. My job was essentially to manage all film festival submissions for the Seattle Lesbian & Gay Film Festival and Translations: the Seattle Transgender Film Festival. In those two years, Jason took on the position of Executive Director at Three Dollar Bill Cinema, and our Festival Programmer left the organisation, leaving the office in a much different dynamic, calling for more support.

In February of 2014, Jason created a position here for me as the Programming Coordinator, and I stepped into that position as year-round staff. Meanwhile, in 2013, RQY had been handed over to a new manager who wasn't able to manage RQY for a second year, and proposed that I take on the job. So I did! And I kicked butt. I don't feel like I made any close friends through Reel Queer Youth as a participant. But I did make great connections as a mentor, and a lot of my connections through the program in general paved the way to where I am now. I'm so lucky for it. The age gap between me and the other mentors wasn't a problem. A lot of times I felt like I knew more than the other mentors, having been through the program as a youth.



A progression route participants automatically get is that each film made is screened at Seattle's Lesbian and Gay Film Festival.<sup>20</sup>

Reel Queer Youth was created to enable LGBTQ youth to learn about filmmaking. Many of the applicants heard about RQY via word of mouth. Participants are required to pay a fee, however, RQY is able to pay fees for young people who are unable to. RQY is funded by Three Dollar Bill Cinema, which means there are no restrictions on what can and can't be bought during the project. The equipment is lent by Reel Grrrls; a leading organisation in the states, that provide creative projects to help empower young girls. The team were also fed each day and one parent helped with the coordination of this, voluntarily. As a set progression route, the young people's films are automatically entered into the Seattle Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, where they screen and, often, a panel discussion takes place with each crew.

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<sup>20</sup> A yearly LGBTQ film festival in Seattle, organised by Three Dollar Bill Cinema.

## Inside Out Queer Video Mentorship Project

Background	Outcomes
In 1998, with the support of Charles St Video, Inside Out initiated the Queer Youth Digital Video Project.	Provide opportunities for youth to learn video production in a supportive environment. The youth project provided young artists with hands on access to the latest video technology – which historically has been financially out of reach for most youth.

The Queer Video Mentorship Project began as a project for LGBTQ youth under 25 who had little experience in video production and wanted a safe space to explore that. Initially, 8 youth took part, used state of the art equipment and produced one short film (6-10 minutes) each. Along the way they helped each other with projects and were allowed to hold casting calls for characters in their films. The project lasted 3/4 months with sessions every weekend and on evenings - totalling to roughly five sessions during the project.

The demographic breakdown of young people Inside Out engaged with is claimed to be diverse in terms of who they are and what their story/idea began as. All participants are required to apply with an idea and the panel (which consists of young people, facilitators, film makers and seniors) decide if you take part based on this idea and your understanding of it and executing it.

The Queer Video Mentorship Project includes youth in the jury panel (who select participants each year) and priority selection into the project is given to those who are diverse in identity and story/idea. The project took a break this year - projects like The Queer Video Mentorship Project struggle with funding because, after 15 years of being a project, they are no longer young, new and innovative like what most funders are attracted to.

The project employed a counsellor during its early years before they decided to see how it would work without a counsellor. They claim it improved the project and like any project, there would still be debate and conflict.

In addition to facilitators, there are mentors on the project who commit to 6-10 hours during the project helping to cement ideas and craft the film into manageable and executable chunks. They also offer career advice. The project employs guest speakers who are LGBTQ Film Festival Directors and Programmers, Video Artists and past participants on The Queer Video Mentorship Project.

At the end of the project youth met with distributors to discuss what's next in terms of getting their film distributed through a company or self-distributing. Many of the young people come back to teach or facilitate in one way or another, they also discuss film festivals that they can submit their films to.

In its 10th year, The Queer Video Mentorship project decided to open its doors up to seniors over 50 and now take 4 young people under 25 and 4 seniors over 50 in each project. The time frame and session days remained the same. This decision was made because they noticed that times had changed with the digital age; youth were competent in media and digital literacy but seniors were not. The plus was that young people were able to teach seniors about filmmaking

and learn their stories, but the down side was that youth became impatient working with seniors. Its Intergenerational approach is to focus on art and the practice of youth and seniors meeting to tell stories in a safe space.

The Queer Video Mentorship Project premieres all films at Inside Out Film Festival. At the beginning of the project, the theatre (500 seater) sold out but recently the ticket sales for the event have been low. The organisation are looking into providing free tickets to attendees as an alternative.

This year, instead of running a project, Winnie Luk (Director of Operations and Events at Inside Out) and the Inside Out team created a retrospective, which essentially commissioned past participants to create new short films and a bridging video where they speak about their experience on the project, the past and where they are now. Each participant was paid via an honorarium, had access to state of the art equipment, budget and an editor.

Next, Inside Out will be meeting with the community (past participants, facilitators, mentors, etc) to see what legacy The Queer Video Mentorship Project can have and what's next.

**Inside Outs Video Mentorship Project was created because the cost of renting/buying equipment and going to school was a struggle for young people. They recruit participants through word of mouth. At one point the project tried to include older LGBTQ people, but there were some problems with this. Funding comes from a range of organisations and companies who also support Inside Out Film Festival. Once the films are made, there is a premiere for friends and family. Over the years, it was noted that the number of attendees to the premiere dwindled. Whilst this was a clear struggle, past participants showed interest in progression routes, by becoming mentors and tutors for the next group of participants.**

## Leadership Camp: Camp Aranu'tiq

Background	Outcomes
Established 2009, Camp Aranu'tiq believes each young person and family can benefit from the comfort and camaraderie that comes with having a shared life experience. At their camp, these shared experiences turn into bonds for life.	Build confidence, resilience and community for transgender and gender variant youth. Learning general leadership skills from experts and applying them to their own projects.

Camp Aranu'tiq is a camp for transgender and gender variant young people. Whilst most camps run by Harbour Camps are summer camps to make friends and be yourself, this particular camp exists for 16-18 year olds who want to learn leadership skills to bring back to their communities, whilst also having fun and meeting new people. During my time as Counsellor at Camp Aranu'tiq, I facilitated creative activities in the Art Shack and mentored young people in exercises to do with leadership. Many young people had confidence sharing their ideas with fellow young people during the camp.

Unfortunately, I am unable to repeat a lot of my experiences at the camp or share case studies as young people would like to keep their identities private. What I do know, however, was being a counsellor gave me a huge sense of privilege seeing young people from the day they arrived to the day they left and during their free time in cabins/bunks. In environments like this, young people seemed very confident in making friends and similarly to Reel Queer Youth, I felt like a part of a group I could relate to.

The aim for Camp Aranu'tiq's Leadership Camp was for young people to explore an idea and discover how they could implement or achieve their goals. Some had started their own Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) at their schools and wanted to learn about fundraising, one had launched a web comic aimed at trans masculine youth, some were looking at making products to sell to the trans community and allies such as t-shirts and one young person wanted to know more about running a shelter for homeless youth. It was inspiring to hear about what the campers were doing back home and what has brought them to Camp Aranu'tiq over the summer. Most importantly, however, their reasons for attending camp were clearly to see friends again, whom they had met at previous camps run by Harbour Camps.

This year, there were 5 counsellors, 2 camp directors and 20 young people. Many young people were returning campers (from Harbour Camps' New England camp) and most campers flew from as far as Texas to attend the camp. Whilst there is a fee to attend the camp, there is also the option for sliding scale payment. Camp Counsellors are also volunteers, however, food, travel and accommodation is covered by the camp.

**Camp Aranu'tiq is a safe space for trans youth to learn, lead and socialise. Interest comes through their online presence and through word of mouth. This camp aims to include the excluded; in this case trans youth in typical summer camp environments. Funding comes from fees being paid by participants, in some cases this is a sliding scale payment scheme. Many youth go away simply feeling like they've had a summer camp experience in a safe space and learned leadership skills.**

## ArtReach Toronto

Background	Outcomes
ArtReach Toronto is a program designed to support arts initiatives that engage youth who have experienced exclusion in under-served areas of Toronto. The idea was formed in 2004.	Young people have opportunities to apply for funding, are supported on how to apply for funding and manage projects for their communities.

ArtReach supports initiatives engaging excluded youth through offering funding and workshops on how to run projects. They have funded some of SOY's Trans projects including a graphic novel. Art Reach claims to be a "low barrier, high support funder," and was set up originally as a political response to the reality to youth death by gun violence in Toronto. There were people in the social change community who wanted to know how to reach youth, but they soon realised that only youth can reach youth and only youth know how to tackle youth issues. So, from the very start, Art Reach engaged with young people who were involved in the development of the idea.

They held monthly development workshops created via the consultation of youth and geared towards youth and artists wanting to learn more about the arts industry. Art Reach created toolkits with the help of youth (who were rewarded with a certificate in grassroots organising and leadership) - these toolkits and workshops aim to demystify the process of applying for funding.

They have a grant review team made up of 11 youth from all walks of life and are granted \$300,000 a year from Toronto Arts Council to award to projects. Each year, they receive roughly 80 applications, of those, 30 are awarded funding on average. Art Reach fund projects where they identify young people who demonstrate leadership skills. Through this they are investing in the future / ability of the community to meet its own needs and face challenges. It's noted that arts in schools are lacking in poorer areas of the country – so Art Reach is the perfect alternative to that; funding projects that engage with these underprivileged communities and offer mentorship to the people who apply to or want to apply for funding.

Projects they have funded include: REX Pride media arts project, SOY Trans graphic novel, South Asian Queer Network, Toronto Kiki Ballroom Alliance - because this is an emerging art form that is not supported elsewhere, even though it's a dated art form. SOY living Trans pride project (space provided only, not a project), Illnana (Blockorama, Right to Dance, pro ballet dance classes for LGBT and diverse people), Color Me DRAGG (pitch contest winner 2010).

**ArtReach supports youth in funding knowledge. Many of the young people hear about ArtReach through word of mouth and community pop ups. They are a low barrier, high support funder and funded by Toronto Arts Council, which they are free to distribute how they want amongst applicants/projects. What's great about ArtReach is they have included young people in the creation of ArtReach and they create toolkits that can be freely downloaded from their website.**

# Conclusion

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During my time traveling around Canada and the U.S., I was able to experience creative and leadership projects in many different forms. I looked at the environments: home through the Ali Forney Center, School through The Triangle Program and Community through the projects I explored, whether through teaching young people myself, attending workshops in Peer Education (H.E.A.T. and Ally Safe Schools), looking at funding for projects through ArtReach or learning about programs like Click, providing mentors for young people.

I explored a set of aims through meeting with service providers and organisations as well as teaching young people filmmaking skills and talking to young people about their experiences on projects. For UK based organisations and/or projects aiming to engage with LGBTQ young people on creative and/or leadership projects, here are a set of recommendations:-

## Recommendations

### Common barriers and needs of LGBTQ youth who take part in projects

- **Consultation:** ArtReach engaged with young people from the very beginning of their project. They worked with young people to design a logo and also talk about how the program would operate. No doubt, the needs of young people were addressed during the consultation process and a set of toolkits were produced by young people for potential applicants.
- **Cost:** Many organisations offered travel tokens and honorariums to young people who took part and then went on to complete projects. In the UK, Puffball; a performance project working with LGBTQ youth at the Roundhouse, offered young people travel and food reimbursement for their involvement in the project. For those that went on to be in the touring show, a weekly fee was paid to them during the Research and Development phase and tour.
- **Homelessness:** The rate of homelessness amongst LGBTQ youth is high and there are negative implications that having multiple needs could have on a young LGBTQ person. Ali Forney Center provides the largest and most comprehensive program for LGBTQ youth in the country, including substance use education therapy, writing and safe sex workshops. Similarly, in the UK, The Albert Kennedy Trust offer safe housing, mentoring opportunities and a supper club to homeless youth.

### Recruit LGBTQ youth onto projects and maintain their engagement

- **Counsellor:** Inside Out Queer Video Mentorship Project had an onsite counsellor to support young people, particularly through the intergenerational stage. This was to ensure the projects remained safe for participants, especially if any problems arose; however, it seemed the counsellor was not fully aware of their own ageism toward participants. For younger participants, the presence of counsellors proved more troublesome than resolute.
- **Evaluate:** SOY conducted evaluations on a differing basis. For example, with CLICK there is a regular update that both mentor and mentees must adhere to, with H.E.A.T. there are regular check ins to make sure everyone is learning at the same pace and with

FLAME there are surveys online and daily check ins after workshops to ensure young people are getting what they want from the program. Reel Queer Youth conducted an online survey for mentors and participants to complete after the program, which then fed into the next program with the aim of improving how it operates.

- **Social Media:** Young people seemed to respond more to recruitment via social media, however, SOY was transparent in their lack of a Communications Officer. This was partly due to funding and many staff members advertised their own projects and did outreach on top of their duties.
- **Word of Mouth and Referrals:** Organisations like SOY and The Triangle Program recruit young people through word of mouth and referrals from other organisations working with LGBTQ youth. This is a testament to the positive work they are doing as well as the increasing rate of LGBTQ youth needing their services.

### **Including the excluded e.g. transgender, ethnic minority, disabled**

- **Ethnic Minority Safe Spaces:** In Toronto, SOY had a variety of groups for minorities. Black Queer Youth ran once a week and allowed BME (Black and Ethnic Minority) youth to come and hang out with other BME youth. Every week was different including film nights, discussion nights, arts and crafts and group dinners. London based project, Shout! runs creative writing workshops for LGBTQ BME (Black and Ethnic Minority) young people, where they work together in the lead up to a live night. This is a key example of a smaller scale project that receives funding to work with a specific group of people within the UK.
- **Employing Diverse Staff:** Part of FLAME's funding is specifically for deaf tutors and interpreters to work on projects. Whilst they put out recruitment calls for deaf young people, they found that knowing people with similar needs on the project didn't necessarily mean deaf people were going to want to take part in them. SOY also uses specific funding for sign language interpreters at events. Try to ensure young people have someone they feel they can identify with. If there is no one young people can identify with, checking in with them will help bring up any concerns they have and they can in turn be dealt with accordingly.
- **Literacy:** An aspect of Reel Queer Youth that I found interesting was the Media Literacy strand of the project. For the first two days we were able to watch clips from films and discuss how a certain minority group was represented. In the case of this workshop, we discussed the representation of LGBTQ people in mainstream cinema. Similarly, at The Triangle Program, students attend classes on LGBTQ history – some even taking part in a timeline project, highlighting key events in LGBTQ history. This gave young people a chance to openly discuss representation history and use creative practice to respond to what they have seen.
- **Trans Safe Spaces:** At Camp Aranu'tiq, I saw the benefits of a "trans only" space – especially in a camping environment where young people are often split into bunks/cabins for girls or boys. There are many other camping opportunities for LGBTQ youth in the U.S., and in the UK, Mermaids runs a yearly camp for trans and gender conforming young people.



## Funding routes and restrictions

- **Funding opportunities for young people:** ArtReach offered funding to young people in Toronto as well as toolkits and workshops on how to apply for arts funding. They are a leading organisation specifically targeted towards young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, offering support and workshops to help funding be more accessible. A similar organisation in the UK is Ideastap<sup>21</sup>, who offer funding opportunities to young people.
- **Restrictive funding:** SOY applied for funding specifically for access needs of young people. They paid a sign language interpreter and hired deaf tutors for young people who were also deaf. Whilst restricted funding can be a bother for some organisations, this is an example of funding that can be used to improve a program or project.

## Recognise achievements of LGBTQ youth on projects

- **Exposure:** Both Reel Queer Youth and Inside Out Queer Mentorship Video Project hosted screenings of participants completed films. In addition to this, Reel Queer Youth continue to submit their films to film festivals to get the participants and their films more exposure. All films made on the Reel Queer Youth project each are screened at the Seattle Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and a panel discussion with some of the young people is held.
- **Needs Assessment and Tracking Progress:** In the past I have worked with organisations that conduct Needs Assessments with young people about to begin long term projects. This is essentially a 1:1 meeting with each young person before they begin the project, where they are asked about their skills, what they think might stop them from completing the project, what they want to do afterwards and other needs such as childcare costs, travel costs or their home environments e.g. perhaps they are in unstable accommodation and move around a lot. All these factors affect a young person's involvement in a project and it's best to know all you can before they begin. They should also be asked what they want to achieve during their time on the project and afterwards – regular check-ins will see how they are doing in relation to these goals. SOY spoke about daily check-ins with young people, specifically at H.E.A.T. By recognising their goals being achieved as the projects progresses and rewarding young people with honorariums as they complete each module, young people and mentors are able to see how far they are coming more clearly. It's also a good idea to conduct exit interviews with young people and tutors and ascertain progression routes.

## Look at methods to allow them to use their skills to assist with projects in the long-term

- **Peer Education:** There is a lack of Peer Education taking place in the UK, compared to the rate of projects existing in Canada and the U.S. A good idea would be to work with young people to run workshops and raise awareness of their own community in the wider community as Ally Safe Schools and H.E.A.T are doing abroad.
- **Follow On Projects:** SOY explored ways to retain engagement of young people in their programs by creating additional programs and services like H.E.A.T., which aimed to

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<sup>21</sup> At the time of writing this report, Ideastap was facing closure due to funding cuts.

give young people further progression routes into Peer Education and Mentoring. For example, H.E.A.T. only recruited young people already engaged with SOYs projects and trained them in public speaking.

- **Further Education:** We often doubt the experiences and wealth of understanding young people have, so it's also vital to train adults (parents, teachers, service providers) in being more aware of LGBTQ identities. UK based organisation Gendered Intelligence train organisations and individuals such as teachers and youth workers in gender awareness, covering transgender legislation and gender identity. They don't necessarily involve young people in their training workshops, but it's a start.
- **Volunteering:** One struggle was SOYs attempt to provide volunteering roles was the idea of when young people jump from participant to volunteering roles, they technically can no longer be participants. One problem was giving young volunteers access to private files on other young people can be dangerous for all parties involved. SOY struggled with helping young people feel valued and able to progress in these roles as the amount of responsibility they could have was limited. This is a similar problem I have seen in UK organisations, particularly to do with confidentiality and disclosure of information about other young people – some of whom could be friends from previous projects. There is no organisation in the UK I am aware of that successfully transitions young people in volunteering roles requiring more responsibility. It could be that young people wishing to volunteer are asked to wait for a period of time before applying for volunteer roles. I also see that perhaps the progression route of Peer Education is better in some sense – as young people create a team of other young people, rather than a mix of young volunteers with additional responsibilities and young people. The group create their own entity and construct it the way they wish; under the coordination of a staff member, they could give organisations more progressive ideas on running projects for young people and understanding young people today.

## What next?

The range of programs looked at are a gentle reminder that creativity and activities in leadership can happen anywhere. From the basement of a church to a building above a fast food chain in New York, from a camping site in California to a busy creative business centre in downtown Toronto. The Winston Churchill Fellowship really helped me to experience a world of opportunity, many of which I managed to seek out through networking with likeminded people. Two months after returning to the UK, I returned to Seattle to attend Seattle's Lesbian and Gay Film Festival. "Download My Heart," the film I mentored young people to make premiered with the Reel Queer Youth shorts and I was on the Jury Panel for Best Short throughout the festival.

In the UK, I re-launched Queerhouse Radio; an LGBTQ youth led radio show featuring discussion and music on issues affecting LGBTQ young people. We are a dedicated team who air shows on a bimonthly basis. Most recently, we were featured on SkyNews talking about Healthcare for LGBTQ people and our thoughts on the General Elections.

As the year draws to a close, I plan on helping to create further opportunities for young people in the UK by working with leading organisations in the creative and leadership fields. I am keen on creating partnerships with organisations and projects across the globe to support the development and well-being of LGBTQ young people. In addition to this, I am interested in looking at intergenerational projects for LGBTQ young people, such as sharing stories through creativity or coordinating a mentoring programme. In all projects I looked at in Canada and the U.S., there was scope to begin or develop intergenerational activities with young people and tutors/mentors. Although one particular project, run by Inside Out, came against some barriers when conducting intergenerational projects, there was some fruition.

In 2016, I will be moving to Canada on a Working VISA for roughly 2 years. I hope to continue my career working with LGBTQ young people in creative and/or leadership projects whilst also building on relationships with the UK in the hopes of creating partnerships and sharing good practice.

Follow Limitless LGBTQ for updates on my progress as well as updates on LGBTQ creatives and leaders:

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Limitless-LGBTQ-Creatives-and-Leaders/638202562962795>
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