Creating Trans Specific Survivor Support Groups
Outline for Today

Relationships & Funding (and what we proposed would happen)

Training & Preparing

Support Group Happened!

Learning & Next Steps (what actually happened)
Introductions

Katie Kondrat she

Quinn Gormley she

Rickey Thorn they

Canyon they
Maine is on colonized Wabanaki land.
Maine Is Weird

- More Coastline on Maine Coast than the rest of the East Coast (5,500 miles if you include the islands).
- Most Rural State in the US.
- Whitest state in the US.
- Largest city has <70,000 people.
- Population: 1.3 million.
- There are more than 18,000 trees/Mainer.
- Acadia National Park’s Cadillac Mountain is the highest point in Maine at 1,530 feet.
- State flower is the white pine cone & tassel.

Maine Is Weird
Sexual assault coalition
Provide training/TA to 7 member centers
11 staff
Equity & Access Coordinator

Community Based transgender peer support organization
Focused on Rural Community Support
Largest statewide transgender support network in the United States
Why transgender specific sexual assault services?

- #1 most desired group topic according to MTN internal program survey.
- Anti-oppression framework means creating spaces for marginalized communities, and giving them the resources to be in charge.
- Access to services in a field where trans people are systemically disaffirmed.
- Community in group is unique opportunity for healing.
Overview of relationship history

MECASA LGBTQ+ Advisory Board, est. 2015

Pride Campaigns

Resource guides

Medical & therapist guides

Safe Space training collaboration

Always talk of making support groups better/accessible.
Is this the right time?
The Proposal

- STOP Funding
- Trans Cultural Competency Training
- Advocate Training
- Local advocates & MTN facilitators connect to build groups
- Co-facilitate of three support groups.
In Reality

- STOP Funding
- Trans Cultural Competency Training
- Advocate Training
- Local advocates & MTN facilitators connect to build groups.
- Co-facilitate of three one support group.

AND

- Technical assistance for all centers by MTN
- Shared statewide tools
- Shared learning
Hi, I’m a grapefruit and I’m... I’m part of this complete breakfast.

Support Group

Welcome, grapefruit.

The Group
Where we began: Corralling
Agency Collaboration

- Intake policy and procedure
- Suicidality protocol
- Evaluations
- Peer support v.s. Direct service
Collaboration Example: Intake / Screening

SA center needs and values: Survivor centered, QAS

+ MTN needs and values: Access and peer support

= Standardized statewide tools: The conversation guide
Outreach and Participant Interviews

Done by MTN, not SA center

Social Media

Personal outreach to community members who have disclosed in MTN community
Accessibility

Flexibility to meet each individual where they are

Space: lighting low, quiet space, snacks/social time at beginning scheduled in to ease people into group

Lighting really does matter!!! This was major contribution to the atmosphere
Pretty has purpose
Curriculum Development

Survivor led. Began the first group asking what the group wanted to cover - did a brainstorm on the board of all the topics folks were interested in covering.
Conversation Topics

Navigating overwhelming emotions

Healthy Relationships

Sex and Intimacy after Trauma - Being in your body / safety after trauma

Sexual Trauma invalidating gender identity

Redefining safety and the loss that comes with closing yourself off to others

Navigating societal and political discourse on sexual assault
Conversation Topic: Emotions

STAYING WITH OUR FEELINGS

By Meg John Barker
Sex and Intimacy

How Trauma Can Affect Your Window of Tolerance

Hyperarousal
- This is when you feel extremely stressed, angry, or even out of control. Uncomfortable or threatening feelings can overwhelm you, and you might want to fight or run away.

Dysregulation
- This is when you begin to feel overwhelmed, you may feel anxious, or even anxious, despite feeling relaxed. How do you feel out of control, but you also don’t feel comfortable.

Window of Tolerance
- This is where things feel just right, where you feel just right to engage with the person, the feeling, the story, you’re calm but not tired. You’re alert but not anxious.

Dysregulation
- This is when you’re in a state of mind where you’re feeling overwhelmed, you may feel anxious, or even anxious, despite feeling relaxed. How do you feel out of control, but you also don’t feel comfortable.

Hyperarousal
- This is when you feel extremely stressed or anxious, but instead of feeling relaxed, you feel energized. This might feel like you’re completely focused. It’s not something you choose - your body takes over.
Relationship Theme - Zine

Safety
- Feeling seen "for" who I want to be
- Trust
  - Actively work to stop harm
  - Physical boundaries
  - Not abusive
  - Seeing me as me, not me as a role or idea - the real me, unfiltered, mask off, messiness of me
- Physical behaviors, actions of others in line with what I need from safe person

Accountability
- Open communication
- Feeling safe to discuss harm done and move forward
- Building trust into new relationships in small steps
- Investment
- Being able to be critical/give feedback with love/generative conflict helps us
- Receive feedback + respect boundaries

Trust
- Clear communication of boundaries and expecting talk up
- Listen, non-judgmental to understand-eyes contact
- Open body language, paraphrasing to show understanding, discuss what sharing + being vulnerable
- Believe what I say/what I feel, not trying to hide too far into my feelings or motives
- Dependable - there when you need them, showing up consistently
- Don't shame blame
Key Learnings

- Honor trans mistrust of SA centers
- Show care/repair through trans competency
- Prioritize creating comfort and safety
- Allow for appropriate facilitator vulnerability, tone setting
  - Make space for peer to peer connections
  - Hold the container, questions to kick off discussion
- Encourage creativity and art making for personalized healing
  - In a space of Trans comfort, allow for discomfort
  - Harm is unavoidable and repair is an option
- Group as a safe laboratory for folks to practice relationships
  - Palette cleanser, commitment to trans joy
  - Supervision from trans specific therapist
Big Picture Learnings

TIME & MONEY (WHEN WILL WE LEARN??)

TRANS SPACES ARE VITAL

SUPPORTING TRANS SURVIVORS SERVES ALL SURVIVORS
Outcomes and Data

100% of support group participants stated that:

- their background and identify was respected and that the facilitator from the sexual assault support center was knowledgeable about trans culture and issues.
- they would connect with MaineTransNet and their local sexual assault support center if they needed services in the future.
- because of connecting with their local sexual assault support center and MaineTransNet, they know more about the options and choices available overall.
Outcomes and Data

This space has been unlike any other group I’ve been in and I’ve really appreciated it! Thank you, Rickey and Canyon.

A great experience that helped me with some very specific issues related to my history of being sexually assaulted and the lack of validation that accompanied it.

I've looked for a group that would fit my needs for a while. I'm glad that I found one, and that the group was as supportive and effective as it was.

I wish it lasted longer. I feel like there is a lot I could take from a longer group.
Where do we go from here?

Phase Two: Applied for STOP grant funding for an expanded version of this program, including a full time advocate to be housed at MTN. Additionally, working to get grant funding for a needs assessment for Domestic Violence services for LGBTQ+ people in Maine.

Phase Three: Working with statewide SA/DV coalitions to get federal funding to open an LGBTQ+ specific SA/DV center for Maine.