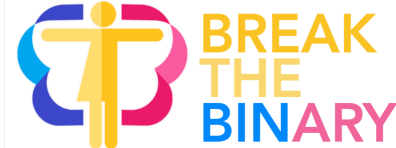




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Liberation Workshop Series

LGBTQIA2S+ UsCC Capacity Building Project
Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health
July 2023 to June 2024

Report & Presentation by:

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Original Project Proposal

Description:

This project will work to reduce barriers to mental health services for BIPOC lesbian, bisexual, queer, and transgender sex workers ages 18+ by (1) providing artistic outlets for participants to practice ceramics, (2) facilitating discussions around mental health barriers and challenges, and (3) connecting them with LACDMH and relevant resources.

Purpose:

During COVID-19, LGBTQIA2S+ sex workers have been deeply impacted financially, emotionally, and physically, and now face greater challenges to survive. After SESTA/FOSTA, many web-based sex workers were forced into street-based sex work, putting their lives in danger and increasing the risk of police interaction. By creating spaces for sex workers to come together through free ceramics classes, we can provide a space for them to express themselves, develop stronger relationships and community ties, discuss their experiences and know they are not alone, and be connected with appropriate resources for mental health, advocacy, and more. Over the course of several months, participants will gain new artistic skills (opportunity to use these skills for financial means in the future), learn new regulation techniques, develop a stronger sense of local resources, and be able to celebrate their work at a community engagement “showcase” event.

Objectives (Timeline):

Recruitment & Coordination (SEPTEMBER 2021 to DECEMBER 2021)

1. Vendor will develop partnerships with key organizations that:
 - a. Have direct access to BIPOC LGBTQIA2S+ sex workers;
 - b. Provide affirming spaces for artistic outlets;
 - c. Provide affirming mental health resources (DMH connected)
2. Vendor will recruit 25 potential participants through referrals, appropriate marketing strategies, and relationship building
3. Vendor will create multi-lingual “needs assessment” online survey for potential participants to complete. Focus will be on:
 - a. Interest in artistic methods (ex. Writing, ceramics)
 - b. Availability and scheduling/frequency of programming
 - c. Challenges/obstacles for participation (ex. Location, schedule)
 - d. Topics for discussion regarding mental health

FACILITATION (JANUARY 2022 to APRIL 2022)

1. Vendor will coordinate participants engaged in ceramics classes (this is based on feedback/insight received through needs assessment). Based on participant availability, classes may be offered:
 - a. Online vs. In-person (due to COVID-19, all classes may need to be offered online only)
 - b. One time class vs. Weekly classes (up to 4-8 weeks per participant)
 - c. Mornings vs. Evenings



- d. Weekdays vs. Weekends
2. Vendor will ensure the curriculum that is designed is adhered to. Daily programming may look like the following (this is an example);
 - a. Participants meet at ceramics studio
 - b. (5-10 minutes) Facilitator leads check in with regulation exercise (ex. Deep breathing, body scan, “senses” activity)
 - c. (90 minutes) Participants learn ceramics and practice on the pottery wheel
 - d. (30 minutes) Participants clean up and prepare for discussion circle
 - e. (60-90 minutes) Facilitator leads discussion circle and promotes appropriate mental health resources for support beyond program
3. Vendor will coordinate incentives for participants and address challenges faced by participants. This may include but is not limited to:
 - a. Travel (ex. Provide Lyft codes or stipends);
 - b. Childcare (ex. Provide stipend or offer onsite childcare)
 - c. Catering (ex. Provide snacks or meal as part of discussion group)
 - d. Accessibility (ex. Ensure spaces are wheel-chair friends, ASL/interpretation provided as needed)

Evaluation & Showcase (MAY 2022 to JUNE 2022)

1. Vendor will conduct a post-program online survey for participants and partners to complete. This will collect information regarding:
 - a. Impact of program;
 - b. Changes in mental health, confidence, resilience (if any);
 - c. Areas for improvement;
 - d. Likelihood to refer other potential participants;
 - e. Remaining challenges or areas to address
2. Vendor will plan and facilitate a showcase event on June 2 in honor of International Sex Workers’ Day:
 - a. Participants can display and sell their pieces or perform/recite their written work;
 - b. Participants will be able to engage with community members and develop new resources, relationships, and opportunities;
 - c. Participants will receive certificates for participation
3. Vendor will compile data from post-program survey into an analysis report then formally present it to LACDMH representatives for consideration of similar programming in the future
 - a. This will be presented at the showcase event in June;
 - b. Community partners will be invited for future consideration

Justification:

The project will be designed for BIPOC sex workers of color (specifically Black, Brown, and Indigenous) ages 18 and older. Vendor will work with subcontractors and partners to ensure that programming and resources provided are culturally affirming and facilitated in relevant

languages. Vendor will ensure that programming is discreet/confidential, trauma-informed, and adaptable as needed.

Outcomes:

By the end of this project, we hope to see the following:

1. Increase in confidence and resilience in participants;
2. Increase in social relationships with peers and community;
3. Increase in linkage to care (mental health services);
4. Increase in trust among participants with local resources

Project Activities

Overview

This project worked to reduce mental health access barriers for LGBTQIA2S+ sex workers by recruiting 15 Participants - majority Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BI&POC) and transgender and/or nonbinary people from various service provider areas (SPA) in Los Angeles County - to meet for engaging pottery classes and relevant discussions. Over the course of March to April 2024, the Participants created several pottery pieces and featured them at a showcase event for LACDMH stakeholders, nonprofit representatives, foundation representatives, local activists, and sector leaders.

Preparation

Before the recruitment of the Participants could begin, preparation of pre and post surveys, recruitment materials, and agenda needed to be developed.

Pre & Post Surveys

Both the pre and post surveys incorporated 11 questions focused on knowledge of user-centered design and mental health factors including support systems, self-care, and resilience. These 11 questions developed with a Likert Scale of 5 answers ranging from Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neutral, Somewhat Disagree, to Strongly Disagree. These questions were based on surveys used by previous LGBTQIA2S+ UsCC CBP contractors including The Wall Las Memorias Project and AMAAD Institute, and were approved by LACDMH.

For the pre survey, we decided to add it as a part of the application that all prospective applicants could complete. This provided an opportunity to receive data and insight from additional LGBTQIA2S+ sex workers outside of the accepted applicants and use the Lab opportunity as an incentive for survey participants. The application additionally included opportunities for applicants to provide personal information, contact information, demographic information, and personal statements. The demographic information related to education level, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and intersex status were developed with support from Kelly Wilkerson and previous applications used for past CBPs.

The post survey was created specifically for the selected group of Participants. It included a section for them to add their personal information, and another section to share their experience in the pottery series, as well as to provide feedback for improvement and consideration.

Recruitment Materials

Using Canva.com, we developed 2 different recruitment flyers that directed prospective participants to the application. The first flyer was in a printer page format (8.5 x 11) so that it could be emailed to various schools, service providers, organizations, and businesses to be printed out and placed around physical locations. It could also be shared as story posts on Instagram and Facebook as it was formatted vertically. The second flyer was in a square format (10 x 10) that could be posted on social media feeds such as Instagram and inserted into email messages instead of being added as an attachment. Both flyers used the same messaging,



theme, and link. Additionally the appropriate logos for LACDMH, the LGBTQIA2S+ UsCC, the 24/7 Access Line, and Break the Binary LLC were featured on both flyers with approval from Kelly Wilkerson.

Agenda

The agenda for the series was created based on a schedule advised and agreed by the owner of the pottery studio we worked with (Pot LA). As a result, the agenda was outlined as the following:

- Session 1
 - Introductions (10 mins)
 - Lesson: Basics of Wheel-Throwing (90 mins)
 - Clean Up (20 mins)
 - Group Discussion: “Your Sex Work Story” (60 mins)
- Session 2
 - Introductions (10 mins)
 - Lesson: Reviewing Basics of Wheel-Throwing (90 mins)
 - Clean Up (20 mins)
 - Group Discussion: “Sex Work Stigma & Assumptions” (60 mins)
- Session 3
 - Introductions (10 mins)
 - Lesson: Basics of Trimming (90 mins)
 - Clean Up (20 mins)
 - Group Discussion: “Sex Work Challenges & Triumphs” (60 mins)
- Session 4
 - Introductions (10 mins)
 - Lesson: Basics of Glazing (90 mins)
 - Clean Up (20 mins)
 - Group Discussion: “Sex Worker Health & Safety” (60 mins)
- Session 5
 - Introductions (10 mins)
 - Lesson: Practice Wheel-Throwing (90 mins)
 - Clean Up (20 mins)
 - Group Discussion: “Reflection & Discussion” (60 mins)

Recruitment

In January 2024, we began distributing the recruitment materials via various methods in search of 10 or more Participants. We promoted the application by emailing several community based organizations, schools, activists, and social media influencers. We also emailed the entire LGBTQIA2S+ UsCC listserv. Additionally the flyers were shared on our social media platforms and reposted by pages with over 1 million followers each, reaching over 200,000 views by people throughout Los Angeles and around the world.

The deadline for the application was March 1, 2024, by which we received a total of 31 applications. After reviewing the applications, the applicant pool was narrowed down based on the following requirements. These requirements were as follows:

- Must identify as LGBTQIA2S+;



- Must currently reside in Los Angeles County;
- Must be ages 18+ during the dates of the series;
- Must be able to attend at least 4 of the 5 days of the series, with guaranteed attendance on the first and last day;;
- Must consent to being recorded during the Lab for LACDMH documentation and reporting purposes.

Selection Criteria

The review of applications was solely conducted by the contractor during March 2024. The contractor made a criteria of priorities based on conversations with Kelly Wilkerson, LACDMH representation, and LGBTQIA2S+ UsCC members. Of the 31 applicants that met the above requirements, the pool was narrowed down to 15 based on the following priorities in the following order:

1. SPA Location: It was of the utmost importance that all 8 SPAs of Los Angeles County were represented among the 15 chosen applicants.
2. Race & Ethnicity: It was also of the utmost importance to center BI&POC applicants during the selection process to ensure intersectionality and diversity in the Lab. The breakdown of number of eligible applicants by race and ethnicity was as follows (note: several applicants chose multiple race and ethnicity options, thus the total number of applicants listed below is higher than the actual total):

- Asian: 6 Applicants
- Black/African American: 12 Applicants
- Indigenous/Native American/Alaska Native: 6 Applicants
- Latinx/Latine: 14 Applicants
- Pacific Islander: 1 Applicant
- Southwest Asian North African (SWANA): 1 Applicants
- White: 5 Applicants
- Undisclosed: 1 Applicant
- Other: 1 Applicants

In order to ensure representation of various BI&POC communities in the chosen applicant pool, the chosen applicant pool had the following makeup of race and ethnicity:

- Asian: 5 Applicants
- Black/African American: 5 Applicants
- Indigenous/Native American/Alaska Native: 1 Applicants
- Latinx/Latine: 8 Applicants
- Pacific Islander: 1 Applicant
- Southwest Asian North African (SWANA): 1 Applicants
- White: 2 Applicant
- Undisclosed: 0 Applicants
- Other: 1 Applicants

3. Transgender Status: We wanted to prioritize applicants who openly identified as transgender, meaning their current gender identity was not the same as their assigned-at-birth gender or sex. Of the total applicant pool, here is the breakdown:
 - Yes, I am transgender: 20 Applicants
 - No, I am not transgender: 9 Applicants



- Unsure: 1 Applicants
- Prefer Not to Share: 1 Applicant

Fortunately we had an incredibly high number of transgender applicants, and we were able to focus on other priorities as a result. The chosen applicant pool had the following makeup of transgender identification:

- Yes, I am transgender: 13 Applicants
- No, I am not transgender: 2 Applicants
- Unsure: 0 Applicants
- Prefer Not to Share: 0 Applicant

4. Gender Identity: We wanted to ensure a diversity of gender identities among the chosen applicant pool. The breakdown of number of eligible applicants by gender identity was as follows (note: several applicants chose multiple gender options, thus the total number of applicants listed below is higher than the actual total. Additionally terms like *man* and *woman* are inclusive of trans men and trans women):

- Agender 1 Applicant
- Genderfluid 3 Applicants
- Man 2 Applicants
- Nonbinary 10 Applicants
- Two-Spirit 3 Applicants
- Woman 14 Applicants
- Prefer Not to Share 1 Applicant
- Other 5 Applicants

LACDMH requested that we prioritize Two-Spirit communities. The chosen applicant pool had the following makeup of gender identities:

- Agender 1 Applicants
- Genderfluid 3 Applicants
- Man 1 Applicants
- Nonbinary 3 Applicants
- Two-Spirit 3 Applicant
- Woman 7 Applicants
- Prefer Not to Share 0 Applicants
- Other 3 Applicants

5. Intersex Status: We wanted to prioritize intersex applicants - people with sex characteristics that do not align with the traditional sex binary of male or female - in the selection process due to the lack of representation of intersex people in LGBTQIA2S+ spaces.

- Yes, I am intersex 4 Applicants
- No, I am not intersex : 24 Applicants
- Unsure: 1 Applicants
- Prefer Not to Share: 2 Applicant

After prioritizing the demographic outlined above, the chosen applicant pool had the following makeup of intersex identification:

- Yes, I am intersex 2 Applicant
- No, I am not intersex : 13 Applicants
- Unsure: 0 Applicants
- Prefer Not to Share: 0 Applicant



6. Sexual Orientation: We wanted to ensure that the Lab and Participantship had a diversity of sexual orientations. The breakdown of number of eligible applicants by sexual orientation was as follows (note: several applicants chose multiple sexual orientation options, thus the total number of applicants listed below is higher than the actual total):

- Asexual 1
- Bisexual or Bi+ 11
- Gay 7
- Fluid 5
- Lesbian 6
- Pansexual 8
- Queer 16
- Questioning 2
- Straight/Heterosexual 1
- Two-Spirit 1
- Prefer Not to Share 1
- Other 1

LACDMH asked us to prioritize Bi+/Bisexual and Lesbian communities. The chosen applicant pool had the following makeup of sexual orientations:

- Asexual 1
- Bisexual or Bi+ 4
- Gay 3
- Fluid 5
- Lesbian 0
- Pansexual 6
- Queer 8
- Questioning 2
- Straight/Heterosexual 1
- Two-Spirit 1

7. Pre-Lab Assessment: At this point in the application process, it was important to review the results of the pre-lab assessment that included questions around mental health factors and knowledge of user-centered design. We wanted to prioritize applicants who did not answer “Strongly Agree” to every answer since we were seeking participants who would be able to improve various mental health factors and build knowledge around user-centered design through the Lab and Participantship. (More about this is discussed in the *Outcomes & Results* section of the report)

8. Personal Statements: Finally, it was important to take time to read through the various personal statements in each application. We were looking for answers that indicated a passion for LGBTQIA2S+ advocacy and empowerment, an experience with problem-solving and/or community engagement, and a sense of personality and identity beyond their LGBTQIA2S+ identities.

On April 1, 2024, the applicants were notified of the status of their applications. Those who were not selected were provided with additional resources for LGBTQIA2S+ mental health, along with information about the LACDMH LGBTQIA2S+ UsCC to encourage them to attend and get involved.

The 15 applicants that were selected were asked to confirm their interest and attendance. They were also provided with helpful information about expectations, parking, and compensation.

Facilitation

The Liberation Workshop Series began on March 26, 2024 and ended on April 25, 2024, and was entirely facilitated by the project contractor, Addison Rose Vincent. There were 2 tracks of classes - Tuesdays 2-5pm (03/26, 04/02, 04/09, 04/16, and 04/23) and Thursdays 2-5pm (03/28, 04/04, 04/11, 04/18, and 04/25) - and we coordinated with Participants who were missing specific days or needed extra support. Each session was 3 hours, with the first 2 hours being the pottery class and the last 1 hour being a discussion about LGBTQIA2S+ sex worker relevant topics.

There were also specific components that were added to each day of the series, including opening and closing with meditation and grounding activities such as deep breaths and stretches, starting each session with a reminder of community guidelines, ending each day with words of affirmation, and closing sessions by reminding Participants about the LACDMH 24/7 Help Line and encouraging them to them to share something that brings them joy.

The series was hosted at both of POT LA's locations: Echo Park (Tuesdays) and Gardens/Midcity (Thursdays). These studios were selected due to their central location for all participants and their affirming spaces for the LGBTQIA2S+ community. The Facilitator arranged the tables and chairs in the room for Participants to be able to flow and discuss freely after working on the pottery wheels.

The Facilitator ensured that water and snacks were available for all Participants to enjoy during each session, including vegan, gluten-free and soy-free options.

The showcase event on Friday May 10, 2024 titled Advocacy in Action featured all Participants' final pieces for the public to see and enjoy. The event had roughly 40 attendees and included catering from The Gro House. The event was from 1-3pm, and 2 of the Participants agreed to speak in front of the group about their experience in the series.

By the end of the series, each Participant was sent an electronic payment of \$500 for their participation in the series. They were also offered the opportunity to request reference letters for future opportunities, and received certificates of participation signed by Break The Binary LLC and LACDMH.

Outcomes & Results

Immediately after the Lab ended, I sent an email asking all 15 Participants to complete the post-Lab survey in order to receive payment. The post-Lab survey included the same 11 Likert scale questions that all applicants needed to complete before the Lab. The answers were arranged as options to choose between 1 and 5, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree" to 5 being "Strongly Agree." Below are various findings:

Question: If I have a concern or problem, I know what to do and who to talk to.

Average Applicant Answer:	3.84
Average Pre-Lab Participant Answer:	3.93
Average Post-Lab Participant Answer:	4.60



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Question: I am comfortable seeking mental health assistance when needed, regardless of my sexual orientation or gender identity.

Average Applicant Answer: 3.81
Average Pre-Lab Participant Answer: 4.00
Average Post-Lab Participant Answer: 4.13

Question: I know the necessary steps it takes to arrange an appointment for myself with a mental health professional if needed.

Average Applicant Answer: 3.68
Average Pre-Lab Participant Answer: 3.73
Average Post-Lab Participant Answer: 4.33

Question: I feel safe when accessing mental health services.

Average Applicant Answer: 3.26
Average Pre-Lab Participant Answer: 3.47
Average Post-Lab Participant Answer: 3.87

Question: I know ways to advocate for my own mental health.

Average Applicant Answer: 3.94
Average Pre-Lab Participant Answer: 4.07
Average Post-Lab Participant Answer: 4.40

Question: I know ways to advocate for my community's mental health.

Average Applicant Answer: 3.65
Average Pre-Lab Participant Answer: 3.80
Average Post-Lab Participant Answer: 4.67

Question: I am comfortable talking about mental health issues with my community.

Average Applicant Answer: 4.10
Average Pre-Lab Participant Answer: 4.40
Average Post-Lab Participant Answer: 4.87

Question: I am able to distinguish positive and negative coping mechanisms.

Average Applicant Answer: 4.00
Average Pre-Lab Participant Answer: 4.20
Average Post-Lab Participant Answer: 4.53

Question: When I am in distress, I practice healthy coping mechanisms.

Average Applicant Answer: 3.39
Average Pre-Lab Participant Answer: 3.40
Average Post-Lab Participant Answer: 3.93

Question: I see myself as a leader in my community.

Average Applicant Answer: 3.58
Average Pre-Lab Participant Answer: 3.67
Average Post-Lab Participant Answer: 4.20

Question: I know how to develop user-centered strategies.

Average Applicant Answer: 3.16
 Average Pre-Lab Participant Answer: 3.60
 Average Post-Lab Participant Answer: 4.73

It's clear that the applicants selected self-scored higher on various mental health and knowledge questions on average compared to the overall applicant pool, and it's also clear that after the last sessions the Participants self-scored even higher on the same questions on average - with their new averages being higher on all questions and higher than the averages of the overall applicant pool on all questions.

The post survey also presented qualitative data and feedback on each Participant's experience. Various terms used to describe the Lab included the following:

it was an incredible and moving experience.
Healing, community, and collective liberation
therapeutic, liberating, inspiring
Revitalizing, Nourishing, Creation
Powerful, healing, inspirational
Enjoying, Welcoming, Liberating
Information community sharing
It was very empowering and supportive meeting other sex workers who I could feel safe to share my lived experience with sex work while also building community and a better sense of my mental health/self understanding
Healing, positive, fun
Meditative, Empowering, and Community-Building
Communal, Safe, Accessible
Fun, confidential, liberating
Grounding, informative, healing
inclusive art therapy
Liberating, Rejuvenating, Creative-Connection

When asked to share one thing they are gaining from this experience, the Participants wrote the following:

I learned patience with myself
Peer support
new friendships with other queer/trans swers. the feeling of community
I have gained new friends and a deeper love and understanding of the experience of my peers.

I gained friends and my own strength to prioritize myself and my own healing over showing up for others before myself.
Community
Relatable and shared experiences
Community and empowerment
Met so many amazing trans folks in the Los Angeles community and made some new friends. Was so nice to get my hands back on clay after 15 years! Gained back more of my confidence as a sculptor and made some new friends in the process.
Realization and reminder that QTBIPOC SW keep each other safe and take care of each other. We cannot expect others to provide the level of care we need,
Aside from a new skill I was able to build community.
I found the ability to further understand who I am both in and out of my field of work and to love myself throughout it all.
Feeling more connected to my SW community and excited to feel more supported
a better understanding of what having community has done for me, and can continue to do for me
Rejuvenated my spark for creativity, and helped me connect more with fellow queer SWers

When asked about how the Lab could be improved in the future, Participants shared the following feedback:

I think everything was great
More black/ African American representation
everything went perfect in my eyes. the facility was great, there wsd always a good amount of people participating, loved all of the topics we had each week. would love to do this again with another art.
I think it was beautifully coordinated and well facilitated.
I think Id love for even more participants so hopefully once we have the showcase, this workshop can happen again and others can participate in this.
N/A
Was great how it ran
None it was amazing 💕
NA - Addie did an AMAZING job
Discussion topics could be improved slightly, more focused for sex workers. Everything else was perfect.
I believe ride vouchers to and from the lab would be very helpful

I personally think that this was a great experience: no critiques, but do continue these opportunities for people.
I would love if we could attend more classes at the wheel
more of these happening throughout the year!
More opportunities to make up missed classes, due to scheduling conflicts, lack of transportation etc

Conclusion & Next Steps

Overall, the series felt like a success. The survey results show an overall positive impact on participants both quantitatively and qualitatively. In addition to the constructive feedback provided by the Participants themselves, there are further factors for consideration in future implementations of this model or project concept:

1. Language. The entire process was conducted solely in English, and for this group of Participants an ASL interpreter was not needed. It should be considered whether the future facilitator(s) are able to facilitate all parts of the process in multiple languages and with more accessibility options for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.
2. Communication etiquette. Although most participants in the Lab were aware of and respectful of their time speaking and sharing in larger group settings, a couple of Participants repeatedly took up a long period of time sharing information that was not necessary to the schedule. With that said, it should be recommended to include forms of accountability or warnings for talking too long. If the facilitator is uncomfortable setting those boundaries in a group setting, perhaps a community agreement can be developed that encourages everyone present to feel empowered to say something and/or set that boundary.

At Break The Binary LLC, we would be honored to continue working with LACDMH and the LGBTQIA2S+ UsCC in the future on projects like this, ones that both empower the communities we serve and give opportunities for our communities to empower us.