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The essential philosophy of serving youth with diverse SOGIE: A 2-part series

(SOGIE: sexual orientation and gender identity/expression)

Part 1:

[A Case Study](#)

The rural town where Adam grew up is small by most measures. With a population hovering around 13,000, a single high school serves the area's teenagers. The temperature rarely rises above freezing in the winter, and storms have been known to drop blankets of snow in a single night. A person can easily walk from one end of town to the other in half a day.

The community is tightly woven; business owners and farmers, teachers and civil servants are often the same person. Adam's uncle was the family's landlord. As in many rural communities, residents grew up together, know each other by name, and share similar backgrounds. Opinions and judgments are shared by many and spread quickly. Support and scorn alike are delivered with a force that can feel monolithic.

In such an environment, if someone does not fit into established cultural norms, the fishbowl setting is often amplified. Too large a deviation from what is familiar can result in widespread ridicule and limited advocacy. This was the struggle that Adam confronted at age 15.

Born female, Adam had never felt comfortable in his own skin. When he decided to come out publicly and identify as male, community support was nearly nonexistent. Among peers and family, only his father seemed to appreciate Adam's situation, and stood up as his lone backer. But even with such minimal support, Adam couldn't have anticipated the amount of adversity and bullying he'd face.

The wave of ridicule built quickly over the span of two months. The environment at school worsened so much that Adam was forced to drop out. In the dead of winter, his uncle refused to continue providing him

residence because he identified as male. It seemed that nearly everything and everyone he knew had turned against him.

Driven from school and home, and with no alternatives in their small town, Adam and his father decided to make a drastic change. The two of them would head west with few prospects and start a new life in Los Angeles. They figured that the warmer climate would take pressure off their financial situation, and a larger city would offer more opportunities for Adam to be himself. But the move had consequences. The first night after arriving, the two slept in their car. With nowhere else to stay, they were homeless.

Read the rest of Part 1

[www.carf.org/SOGIE Case Study](http://www.carf.org/SOGIE_Case_Study)

Part 2:

4 practices to develop a SOGIE-literate culture

Meeting the needs of youth with diverse SOGIE doesn't mean creating special practices for LGBTQ youth. Rather, it has to do with creating a culturally humble philosophy that addresses youth whatever their unique background is, LGBTQ or otherwise.

As opposed to an LGBTQ label, everyone has a SOGIE that can shape their needs and experiences. Being open to diverse SOGIE can help your organization be more accepting of the whole child.

Mark Supper, CEO of LAYN, agrees that a service framework works best when it doesn't put labels on people. "When you have younger youth, particularly ages 12 to 17, there's a lot of exploration anyway. It's important that we don't put a label on it for them, but allow them that freedom to discover it and work through it on their own."

Also included in SOGIE is gender expression, which isn't necessarily within the sphere of an LGBTQ label but can be an important aspect of who a youth is. Supper encourages acceptance of diverse gender expressions into your cultural competency efforts, saying, "Foster and homeless youth have a tremendous amount of other challenges that they are facing. The last thing you want to do is add to that pile of challenges by closing that door to their gender expression. For any youth, you really need to create that space where they are not feeling judged and they can experiment with their clothes, their hair, or whatever it is."

Supper identified four practices that help LAYN stay inclusive of diverse SOGIE.

Read the rest of Part 2

[www.carf.org/4 SOGIE practices](http://www.carf.org/4_SOGIE_practices)

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Tucson, AZ 85756

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