

# Status Report on

## Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth In Wisconsin



Diverse & Resilient



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April 2006

By Narra Smith Cox, Ph.D., Gary Hollander, Ph.D.

And members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth Advisory Council, including: *Barbara Bitters, Brenda Coley, Cindy Crane, Elna Hickson, Karen Johnson, Shannon Kenevan, Marilyn Levin, Mark O'Neil, Jason Rasmussen, and Hector Torres, Ph.D.*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Status Report on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth in Wisconsin is intended to generate critical thinking about ways in which educators, mentors, parents, youth workers, advocates, policymakers, funders and others can actively support the healthy development of LGBTQ youth. In addition, it is intended to motivate individuals and organizations to take action – big or small, personal or public – to support LGBTQ youth in this state. The specific purposes of this paper are the following:

1. Provide background information and serve as a call to action for:
  - policy and decision-makers, including school administrators;
  - organizations and individuals that financially support populations in need; and,
  - organizations that directly serve youth;
2. Serve as a resource for workshops and other professional development activities related to working with LGBTQ youth; and
3. Serve as a “social documentary” of the status of LGBTQ youth in Wisconsin in 2006.

### KEY FINDINGS

#### A review of existing data found:

1. There are significant gaps in data to adequately describe LGBTQ youth in Wisconsin.
2. Some young people feel confused about their sexual orientation or gender identity in middle school and/or high school, and others discover their identity at an early age. For some youth, the process of discovery and understanding of self takes a long time.
3. In general, LGB youth feel supported by their families, but this is less true for them than for their heterosexual peers.

4. In addition to their parents, most LGB youth can identify one or more adults with whom they feel comfortable and could seek help, but this is less true for them than for their peers who are not perceived to be gay, lesbian or bisexual.
5. Young LGB youth can thrive when they feel supported by family, peers, schools and the community.
6. The majority of middle and high school age youth report they are accepting of youth who identify as gay or lesbian, but many LGBTQ youth do not experience an accepting atmosphere.
7. A significant number of Wisconsin LGBTQ youth do not feel safe at school.
8. Many LGBTQ youth experience sexual harassment at school.
9. A significant proportion of LGBTQ youth are not aware of their legal protection against harassment and discrimination at school.
10. While many LGBTQ youth will develop to be healthy and well-adjusted adults, LGBTQ youth are at disproportionate risk for negative physical and mental health outcomes.
11. LGBTQ youth disproportionately engage in negative health behaviors compared to their heterosexual peers.
12. A significant number of LGBT youth miss some school because of safety concerns at school or going to or from school, and this can result in lower academic achievement and diminished educational aspirations.
13. When doing well, some LGBTQ youth experience pressure to serve as lesbian, gay or transgender role models.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Individuals and organizations are encouraged to take actions that provide basic levels of support for LGBTQ youth, and to accept the challenge of providing meaningful and significant support that will contribute to the health and well-being of all LGBTQ youth in Wisconsin.

**Parents, Peers and Partners:**

- Share values and teach life skills, including problem-solving and goal-setting.
- Intervene in bullying situations to make families and peer groups safe, educate about the consequences of bullying, and assist youth in navigating systems intended for their support.
- Learn about adolescent development, including sexual identity development, to provide appropriate and supportive parenting including negotiating skills, developmentally-appropriate autonomy, and refusal skills.
- Assist youth with their perception of the expanded life options that are available to them. Challenge the stereotypic view of LGBT people as white, middle-class consumers.
- Become culturally competent with regard to LGBTQ youth culture.

**Schools, Youth Groups, Faith Communities and Other Community-based Organizations:**

- Address gaps in data by collecting relevant health and risk information from LGBT youth and making it broadly available to policy makers.
- Implement existing nondiscrimination laws and policies. Support school staff and students in learning to recognize and interrupt discrimination and harassment.
- Support development of Gay Straight Alliances in high schools and middle schools.
- Hire youth program advisors knowledgeable about youth development programming for LGBTQ youth, or who are willing to learn.
- Support opportunities for professional development related to LGBTQ youth for staff who work with youth.
- Provide funding and other support for community-based LGBT youth groups.
- Challenge faith communities to support LGBT people throughout their entire lives.
- Notice the presence of heterosexual allies, and support and encourage them to take public stands in support of LGBT individuals and their rights.
- Take on the responsibility of serving as role models for LGBT youth that assist with the transition to physically and emotionally healthy adulthood.
- Assist youth with their perception of the expanded life options that are available to them. Challenge the stereotypic views of what it means to be a LGBT

youth or adult; encourage psychological independence so as to not be constrained by stereotypes and expectations.

- Challenge LGBT adult complacency, resignation and view that current conditions are “as good as it gets.”
- Encourage charitable giving, including by LGBT people, to programs that support LGBTQ youth.
- Support local efforts to conduct needs assessments to identify specific challenges facing LGBTQ youth, as well as existing resources to support positive youth development.
- Develop and provide educational programs for parents, educators and others who work with youth.
- Teach students to critically analyze media that portray stereotypes about LGBT people, including portrayals of LGBT people being in service to heterosexual people.

**Capacity-building Organizations, State Government, Universities, Foundations and Other Societal Institutions:**

- Provide pre-service teachers with information about LGBTQ youth and strategies to make schools safe and welcoming places for all students to learn.
- Increase or re-allocate resources within the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to provide technical assistance to schools related to student nondiscrimination protections.
- Include questions on the Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey (WI-YRBS) to learn more about LGBTQ youth.
- Continue to fund programs to support LGBTQ youth.
- Fund programs for LGBTQ youth that focus on resiliency and youth development in addition to disease prevention.
- Provide funding to build sustainability of programs, particularly in view of the unique needs of LGBT youth and their current dependence on LGBT programs with inadequate resources.
- Collaborate with organizations addressing other systems that diminish individuals’ aspirations and options, including racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression.
- Increase professional development opportunities related to LGBTQ youth for educators, social workers and other youth-serving professionals.

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This Status Report on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ)<sup>1</sup> youth in Wisconsin is intended to generate critical thinking about ways in which educators, mentors, parents, youth workers, advocates, policymakers, funders and others can actively support the healthy development of LGBTQ youth. In addition, it is intended to motivate individuals and organizations to take action – big or small, personal or public – to support LGBTQ youth in this state. The specific purposes of this paper are the following:

1. Provide background information and serve as a call to action for:
  - policy and decision-makers, including school administrators;
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2. Serve as a resource for workshops and other professional development activities related to working with LGBTQ youth; and,
3. Serve as a “social documentary” of the status of LGBTQ youth in Wisconsin in 2006.

Numerous studies have concluded that lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are at a disproportionate risk for HIV infection, suicide, violence, substance abuse and other negative health outcomes compared to their heterosexual peers (Bingham et al, 2002; Udry & Chantala, 2002; Russell & Joyner, 2001; Russell et al, 2001; Goodenow et al, 2002). A new body of research is acknowledging that not only are sexual minority youth as varied as heterosexual youth, but that most become healthy and resilient adults

(Savin-Williams, 2001b). Like all young people, LGBTQ youth benefit from family, peer, school and community supports and environments that foster their development, including acquisition of attitudes, knowledge and skills that enable them to realize their potential and live full and rewarding lives.

A growing number of youth advocates (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, University of Wisconsin-Extension 4-H Youth Development Program, Public/Private Ventures) are embracing the concept of youth development as a philosophy and approach to support young people. Youth development is defined as “a process which prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically and cognitively competent” (National Collaboration for Youth Members, 1998). Positive youth development addresses the broad developmental needs of youth, in contrast to deficit-based or categorical models which focus solely on youth problems or selected issues.

This report on the status of LGBTQ youth in Wisconsin is presented from a youth development framework and is organized in three sections to answer the following questions:

### **Section 1: What is known about LGBTQ youth in Wisconsin?**

This section discusses concepts related to LGBTQ identity and provides estimates of the number of Wisconsin LGBTQ youth. In addition, it summarizes key findings about the environmental supports perceived by youth, as well as the attitudes, aspirations, perceptions and behavioral risks of young LGBTQ youth in Wisconsin. The description

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<sup>1</sup> The LGBTQ acronym is used as an inclusive term acknowledging the range of sexual minority youth and young people who are questioning their sexual identity. The acronym LGB is used to refer to lesbian, gay and bisexual youth. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines adolescents and young adults as persons age 10-24 years including three subgroups: young adolescents, age 10-14, older adolescents, 15-19; and young adults, 20-24. In this paper the terms young people and youth are used to refer to older adolescents, with an emphasis on high school age adolescents.

draws from quantitative and qualitative data sources and identifies numerous gaps in the data about important characteristics of the LGBTQ youth population.

## **Section 2: What is known about the environment in which LGBTQ youth are developing?**

An ecological model provides a framework for discussion about the influences that support and hinder the development of LGBTQ youth, with particular attention to parents, peers, partners, schools, youth groups, faith communities, other community-based organizations and programs, and finally capacity-building organizations, state government agencies, universities and other societal and cultural influences. This section highlights particular organizations supporting LGBTQ youth.

## **Section 3: Recommendations**

The third section concludes with an initial list of recommended strategies and actions that would contribute to the positive development of LGBTQ youth in Wisconsin. Readers are encouraged to reflect, discuss and add recommendations to this list. And then, in partnership with others, plan strategies to implement the recommendations.

## **SECTION 1: WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT LGBTQ YOUTH IN WISCONSIN?**

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**Sexual Identities.** As mentioned above, the term LGBTQ refers to young people with different sexual orientations and sexual identities. Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) youth have sexual identities that are marked by same-sex attractions and/or behaviors. They know themselves to have these identities and – if their environment is safe – will reveal their sexual identity to family, friends and trusted others in their lives. The majority of LGB youth are not easily identifiable – most move in and out of gay and straight identities; many hide their sexual orientation from public view as well. Many others, fearing discrimination and rejection, do not reveal this information until they are independent, older, or away at school.

For transgender youth, gender identity is not self-described as male or female. For some transgender youth, their being male or female at birth does not adequately describe who they see themselves to be. For others, this distinction is sufficient to prompt them to adopt names, attire and actions that are in contrast to their sex at birth. Still others seek hormones or surgical reassignment. Transgender youth may identify as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

There are still other youth in Wisconsin who do not personally describe themselves as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Some of these young people question the very notion of sexual orientation or sexual identity and

describe themselves as “queer.” Those youth whose gender expression is so unlike their heterosexual, gender-typical peers cannot readily hide their sexual orientation and are more readily targeted for discrimination. Still others are unsure of the identity label they will ultimately adopt. These “questioning youth” do not have an identity label, not because they do not agree with the labels per se, but because they are in the process of discernment.

**Number of LGBTQ Youth.** Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) adolescents (ages 15 – 19) in Wisconsin number in the range of 12,000 to 40,000 youth who specifically identify as something other than heterosexual in their orientation or male or female in their gender.<sup>2</sup> These youth are distributed proportionately across all racial/ethnic groups, religious backgrounds and socio-economic groups, and live in urban and rural communities around Wisconsin. LGBT youth encompass diversity in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, relationship status, parenthood, health, disabilities, politics and sexual behavior (Garnets and Kimmel, 2003).

**Developmental and Family Dynamics.** While heterosexual youth are generally surrounded with images of heterosexual peers, heroes and role models, LGBT youth are not. Because families of lesbians and gay youth typically are heterosexual, they do not provide the same role models for normal transitions and developmental periods of gay, lesbian and bisexual lives. These youth also discover their sexual orientation at a relatively late point in the process of identity development, often at the same time sexual desire begins to be recognized. These youth also learn negative attitudes about homosexuality, gay men and lesbians from others (both significant others and conventional society); in turn, they learn to apply these attitudes to themselves and their sexual minority peers (Garnets and Kimmel, 2003). LGBT youth have little awareness of any LGBT community history. There are few road maps on how they should proceed; each youth – especially in smaller cities, towns and rural areas – tends to be an individual creation. This may lead to greater potential for “normative creativity,” and at school these youth may be described as artistic, eccentric, or “Goth.” Alternatively, LGBT youth in these settings may model themselves after their heterosexual peers in an attempt to fit in or be invisible.

Family disruption sometimes results when a gay, lesbian, or bisexual orientation is revealed. Moreover, it may be revealed in different ways; by conscious decision on the part of the youth, by positive transition (new relationship, birth of grandchild), or by some negative circumstance (e.g., found engaging in sexual activity).

**Indicators of Health and Well-being.** Much of the data that exist about youth, and therefore much of what we know about LGBTQ youth, focuses only on negative outcomes and the problems facing youth. Ideally, a profile of youth,

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<sup>2</sup> This estimate is derived from calculating a range from 3% to 10% of the 15-19 year olds in Wisconsin according to the 2000 census. The low end represents a conservative estimate; the high end, a liberal one.

including LGBTQ youth, would also include information about positive outcomes, including physical and mental health and wellness, personal values and aspirations, and skills, competencies and achievements. The profile would also describe youth's perception of important environmental factors, including caring relatives and other supportive adults, and opportunities for positive growth and development.

To provide such a profile of LGBTQ youth, and youth in general, data is drawn from a variety of sources. Some quantitative data sets permit comparisons between populations and examination of trends over time. Some surveys use convenience samples and provide important information about a population, but cannot be generalized to the larger population.

Very limited quantitative data exist about the experience of LGBT youth in Wisconsin. With rare exceptions, surveys do not ask youth to identify themselves in terms of sexual orientation. Even when a sexual orientation question is included in surveys, it may not be sufficient to identify youth who have same-sex romantic attractions, or engage in same sex behavior, but do not claim a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity label.

Given the paucity of data on LGBTQ youth in Wisconsin, included here are data that serve as proxies -- survey responses from youth who reported being threatened or hurt because someone thought they were gay, lesbian, or bisexual and survey data about LGB youth in other states. Qualitative data, while also limited, is useful to complement data provided by surveys. Anecdotal stories from youth may not be representative of young people throughout Wisconsin but they do provide a glimpse of the experience of this cohort of LGBTQ youth. Each youth's statement reflects a unique experience, yet from the words of individuals broader themes emerge.

The following data sources were used to develop this profile of LGBTQ youth in Wisconsin:

**Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey (WI-YRBS).** The Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey is a version of the national YRBS administered by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction in Wisconsin public high schools. It includes core questions from the national survey and additional questions. In the spring of 2005, 2,389 students in 52 public high schools in Wisconsin completed the survey. To date the WI-YRBS has not included questions asking about self-identity by sexual orientation or the sex of sexual partners among sexually active students. In the 1997, 1999 and 2001 Wisconsin YRBS surveys a question was included asking whether a student had been threatened or hurt because someone thought they were gay, lesbian or bisexual. This question was eliminated from the 2003 and 2005 surveys.

**2001 YRBS Correlation Analysis.** In an effort to learn more about the health of LGBTQ youth, in 2005 the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) requested the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to analyze the 1997, 1999 and 2001 Wisconsin

YRBS data comparing responses of students who reported being threatened or hurt because of their perceived sexual orientation with their non-threatened peers.

**2005 and 2006 Rainbow Alliance for Youth (RAY) Profiles.** Youth Development Specialists (YDS) associated with each of 10 community-based LGBTQ youth groups in Wisconsin responded to electronic surveys in January 2005 and 2006. In addition to questions about the host organization and youth programming, the survey assessed YDS perceptions of risk behaviors among young people attending the LGBTQ youth group. A limitation of this data set is that for some questions it is not clear whether YDS responses were based on "regular" program participants or were reflective of all youth who at some point attended the program.

**GLSEN's 2003 National School Climate Survey.** In 2003 the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Educators Network (GLSEN) conducted a national survey to assess school climate. The convenience sample included youth involved in randomly selected community-based groups or service organizations, with responses received from 38 of the 50 groups contacted. In addition, the survey was made available on GLSEN's website. A total of 108 youth from 37 Wisconsin school districts completed the survey. The Wisconsin data (GLSEN's 2003 National School Climate Survey: Profile of LGBT Youth in Wisconsin) contributed to the profile of Wisconsin LGBTQ youth. The majority of the Wisconsin respondents identified as white or European-American (82%), female (52%), gay or lesbian (54%) or bisexual (30%).

**The Dane County Youth Assessment 2005.** The Dane County Youth Commission coordinates a collaborative effort with schools, youth-serving agencies and funders to survey 7th through 12th grade youth about their opinions, needs, concerns, interests and aspirations as a basis for planning programs, services and public policies. The survey is conducted at five-year intervals, providing an opportunity to examine trends and changes over a twenty-five year period. In 2005 approximately 15,650 valid surveys were completed, representing youth from fourteen school districts and 80% of 7th through 12th grade students in Dane County. Survey results do not reflect students educated in alternative settings such as home schools, mental health or drug treatment facilities, or juvenile detention settings.

**Diverse and Resilient (D&R) Advisory Council.** In the spring of 2005 a group of eight ethnically/racially diverse young men and women between the ages of 14 and 24 in the Milwaukee area shared their stories about when they first knew they were gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender and what it is like to be "out."

**Diverse and Resilient Program Evaluation data.** Program evaluation data include written reflections of youth development specialists (YDS) and young people participating in biannual Wisconsin Youth HIV Prevention Institutes.

## Key Findings on the Health and Well-being of LGBTQ Youth in Wisconsin

The following findings are based on analysis of environmental supports, youth development indicators, physical and mental health outcomes and risk behaviors. As noted above, some key findings are based on data that serve as proxies for LGBTQ youth.

1. There are significant gaps in data to adequately describe LGBTQ youth in Wisconsin.
  - The statewide YRBS does not currently include questions which make possible analysis by sexual orientation identity, same-sex sexual behaviors, or gender identity.
  - Much of what is known about the health and well-being of LGBTQ youth is based on convenience sample surveys and anecdotal evidence.
  - Data do not exist to determine the extent to which LGBTQ youth:
    - are sexually active,
    - have sexual transmitted infections (STIs),
    - experience relationship violence,
    - believe it is important to delay sexual activity that puts them at risk for STIs,
    - use barrier methods of protection if they are sexually active,
    - would like help to quit smoking if they currently use tobacco,
    - use alcohol or other drugs,
    - have chronic feelings of depression or hopeless,
    - have attempted or thought about suicide,
    - hold part-time jobs while in high school,
    - graduate from high school,
    - plan to attend college,
    - feel confident they are able to live a “big life.”
2. Some young people feel confused about their sexual orientation or gender identity in middle school and/or high school and others discover their identity at an early age. For some youth, the process of discovery and understanding of self takes a long time.
  - *“I had confusing things go on in kindergarten, kissing boys and girls at age 5. I knew something was there, even without a name for it. By 12, I had the name – ‘lesbian.’ I came out to my middle school and began dating other girls. But a year later I came out as an ally to trans folks who were female-to-male. Then I knew a bit later, I am one.” (age 19, FtM transgender, white) (Diverse and Resilient Advisory Council)*
  - *“I’ve been a victim of labels. First as a bisexual, then as a lesbian. Now sometimes I like a guy, and it feels disloyal and weird. Maybe I’m a ‘seasonal bisexual.’ Labels really haven’t worked. The hardest*
3. In general, LGB youth feel supported by their families but this is less true for them than for their heterosexual peers.
  - Fewer youth who reported being threatened or hurt because someone thought they were gay, lesbian or bisexual agree that their family loves and supports them (71.9%) compared to their non-threatened peers (81.5%) (2001 YRBS Correlation Analysis).
4. In addition to their parents, most LGB youth can identify one or more adults with whom they feel comfortable and from whom they could seek help, but this is less true than for them than for their peers who are not perceived to be gay, lesbian or bisexual.
  - A significantly smaller percentage of students who reported being threatened or hurt because someone thought they were gay, lesbian, or bisexual felt comfortable with one or more adults from whom they could seek help (77.8%) compared to other high school students who had not been threatened (86.7%) (2001 YRBS Correlation Analysis).
5. Young LGB youth can thrive when they feel supported by family, peers, schools and the community.
  - *“I went to a school in a conservative city. The teachers were all very friendly, and the students were surprisingly supportive as well. I was completely out from eighth grade on and didn’t have many problems – I even wrote an article in the school newspaper about coming out. I got into a good crowd with all the theater and forensics people, who were extremely accepting. I was always surprised at how scared the other gay people were at my school – they were terrified that something bad would happen if they came out, even though I was doing well being out.” (age 20, FtM transgender, white) (Diverse and Resilient Advisory Council)*
6. The vast majority of middle and high school age youth report they are accepting of youth who identify as gay or lesbian but many LGBTQ youth do not experience an accepting atmosphere.
  - The majority of respondents reported hearing homophobic remarks frequently in their schools, with many of the remarks unchallenged by other youth or faculty/staff (GLSEN School Climate Survey).
  - *“Like, since kindergarten. I wasn’t included in the boy activities. I’d get stuck with jump rope and hopscotch. In middle school, I started getting called gay. The same kids called me all sorts of things and*

*the guys excluded me – even from required class projects. I'd get stuck with girls who also didn't want my participation. By high school, I made myself an outcast initially, but came out as gay as a sophomore. I remember being excluded as feminine long before I knew I was attracted to boys.”(age 18, male, African American) (Diverse and Resilient Advisory Council)*

7. A significant number of Wisconsin LGBTQ youth do not feel safe at school.
  - Over half of the Wisconsin LGBT youth reported feeling unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation with one third reporting being physically harassed (GLSEN School Climate Survey).
  - Transgender youth were most likely to feel unsafe. About one third of the Wisconsin LGBT youth respondents reported missing at least a portion of a school day in the past month because they felt unsafe (GLSEN School Climate Survey).
  - More high school students who reported being threatened because someone thought they were gay, lesbian or bisexual reported being threatened or injured at school (24.7%) compared to their non-threatened peers (7.0%) (2001 YRBS Correlation Analysis).
  - More high school students who reported being threatened because someone thought they were gay, lesbian or bisexual did not go to school because they felt unsafe (15.3%) compared to their non-threatened high school peers (3.7%) (2001 YRBS Correlation Analysis).
8. Many LGBTQ youth experience sexual harassment at school.
  - More high school students who reported being threatened because someone thought they were gay, lesbian or bisexual reported being sexually harassed at school (46.4%) compared to their non-threatened peers (18.2%) (2001 YRBS Correlation Analysis).
9. A significant proportion of LGBTQ youth are not aware of their legal protection against harassment and discrimination at school.
  - Over one quarter of youth reported they were not aware that their school had a policy about harassment and assault (GLSEN School Climate Survey: Wisconsin Data).
10. While many LGBTQ will develop to be healthy and well-adjusted adults, LGBTQ youth are at disproportionate risk for negative physical and mental health outcomes.
  - Nationally, the prevalence of HIV infection among young urban MSM aged 15-22 sampled in seven U.S. cities was 7.2% (MMWR Weekly, 2001).
- More high school students who reported being threatened because someone thought they were gay, lesbian or bisexual reported feeling so sad they stopped doing usual activities (41.8%) compared to their non-threatened peers (26.6%) (2001 YRBS Correlation Analysis).
- More high school students who reported being threatened because someone thought they were gay, lesbian or bisexual reported seriously considering suicide (42.1%) compared to their non-threatened peers (21.2%) and attempted suicide (21.8%) compared to their non-threatened peers (7.7%) (2001 YRBS Correlation Analysis).
11. LGBTQ youth disproportionately engage in negative health behaviors compared to their heterosexual peers.
  - Slightly more high school students who reported being threatened because someone thought they were gay, lesbian or bisexual binge drank in the past 30 days (39.7%) compared to their non-threatened peers (32.9%) (2001 YRBS Correlation Analysis).
  - More high school students who reported being threatened because someone thought they were gay, lesbian or bisexual are current smokers (45.3%) compared to their non-threatened peers (35.1%) (2001 YRBS Correlation Analysis).
  - More high school students who reported being threatened because someone thought they were gay, lesbian or bisexual reported using marijuana (47%) than their non-threatened high school peers (35.1%) (2001 YRBS Correlation Analysis).
12. A significant number of LGBTQ youth miss some school because of safety concerns at school or going to or from school, and this can result in lower academic achievement and diminished educational aspirations.
  - More high school students who reported being threatened because someone thought they were gay, lesbian or bisexual did not go to school because they felt unsafe (15.3%) compared to their non-threatened high school peers (3.7%) (2001 YRBS Correlation Analysis).
  - Youth who reported more frequent harassment in school reported lower grades and lower educational aspirations (GLSEN School Climate: Wisconsin Data).
13. When doing well, some LGBTQ youth experience pressure to serve as lesbian or gay role models.
  - *“In high school, people didn't know I was gay until I dated a boy at the end of freshman year. They started calling me ‘that gay guy.’ After that I started to pull back a bit and claimed the label ‘bisexual.’ But within a year, I stopped trying to hide. They still call me a ‘gay boy;’ now it seems like an obligation*

*to be a role model to younger students. I need to do well and try to be the role model they need.”(age 18, male, African American) (Diverse and Resilient Advisory Council)*

## SECTION 2: WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH WISCONSIN LGBTQ YOUTH ARE DEVELOPING?

Ecological systems models (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Moore & Burt, 1982) provide a useful framework for describing environmental factors or conditions that contribute to the development of youth. These models posit that individuals are influenced by a nested system of factors, with the more proximal and direct factors providing more influence on development and behavior than more distal influences. Each of these influences can provide support, albeit in different forms, to increase the likelihood that a young person will develop to his or her full potential.

With regard to LGBTQ youth, a model can be visualized in which as a young person is positioned in the center of a set of three nested fields of influence, as seen in Figure 1.<sup>3</sup> In the field closest to the youth are parents, peers and partners, individuals considered to be most influential on the young person’s development.

Moving outward, the next field of influence includes community organizations other institutions with which youth have regular interactions, such as schools, youth groups and faith communities. Moving further outward, the field of influence includes capacity-building organizations, state governmental agencies, universities, other institutions and broader societal influences. Clearly, for any individual young person the framework might be tailored to more accurately describe environmental factors supporting or limiting his or her healthy development.

### Parents

Most young people in the general population perceive their parents to be supportive. Most parents informally acquire knowledge and skills related to parenting children and adolescents. Heterosexual parents raising a child who is LGBTQ may feel particularly ill-prepared. Few parent groups (e.g., PTO or PTA) claim expertise about parenting a LGBTQ child; some parents of LGBTQ youth turn to one of the 11 Wisconsin chapters of PFLAG, (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) or to individual parents of LGBTQ youth for answers to their questions and other support.

### Peers

Friendships and peer relationships can exert positive or negative influences on young people. LGBTQ youth may be invisible when the environment does not feel safe to them. Youth involved in community-based LGBTQ groups tend to have good friends – both male and female – who also participate in these programs.

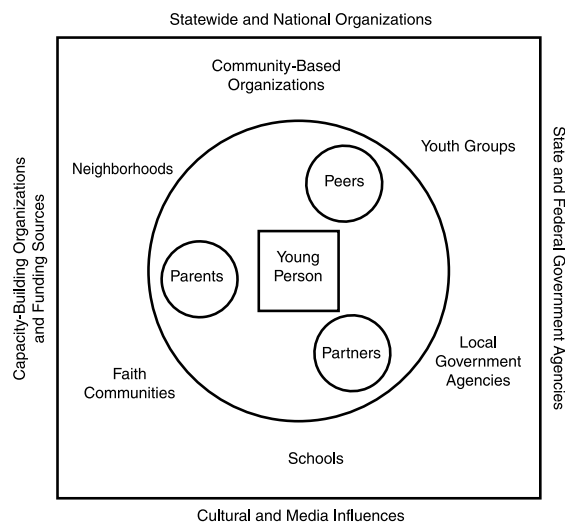


Figure 1: LGBT Youth Development Ecological Model

### Partners

Adolescence is a developmental period in which youth gain experience and skill developing intimate relationships. Many LGBTQ youth do not have as many opportunities to date as do their heterosexual peers. As a result, some LGBTQ youth may be willing to take more emotional or physical risks when they do become involved in an intimate relationship. Among heterosexual youth there is a pattern of young women having boyfriends who are slightly older than they, and sometimes considerably so, which can result in a significant imbalance of power in the relationship. It is not known whether, or to what extent, a similar pattern exists among LGBTQ youth.

In addition to parents, peers and partners, youth have regular interactions with individuals in schools, community-based organizations, including youth groups, faith communities and other community organizations and programs.

### Schools and Related Legislation

While it is estimated that young people spend only about 20% of their waking hours in school, for many youth school is the centerpiece of their lives. The influence of schools is significant, not only as the primary source for acquiring knowledge and skills for a vocation or post-secondary education, but also as a place to develop a range of extracurricular interests and talents. Equally important are the opportunities school provides to interact with a wide variety of people and develop meaningful friendships. Students who perceive a safe and supportive school climate are more likely to feel connected to school.

Too many LGBTQ youth experience an unsafe school environment. It is not known to what extent LGBTQ youth drop out of school as a result, but it is known that the lack of a high school diploma represents an enormous loss of an educational opportunity and has significant implications for the individual’s future health and well-being. Wisconsin’s Pupil Nondiscrimination statute should protect students in all schools from discrimination based on sexual orientation,

<sup>3</sup> This LGBTQ youth development model is based on the Urban Institute’s *Intervention Contexts* model (Moore & Burt, 1982).

yet enforcement varies from district to district.

Almost 70 Wisconsin schools have Gay Straight Alliances, or GSAs. These student-led clubs provide a safe place for students to talk about issues related to sexual orientation and educate the broader school community about sexual orientation and gender issues. In some school communities the GSAs are vibrant and well accepted student clubs. In other schools students have had to struggle to make the GSA a reality, and in the majority of middle schools and high schools no GSA yet exists.

Research in Massachusetts examined a range of strategies to create welcoming and safe schools for LGBTQ youth and concluded that the existence of GSAs alone was not sufficient. Rather, a combination of strategies including statewide legal mandates, access to technical and financial resources to support policy recommendations, and active support of the school principal was important. In addition, active support of educators, community and student leaders was more likely to result in long-term systemic change based on the notion that all students should be able to obtain public education without fear of being hurt and without fear of harassment based on their gender, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation (Griffin & Ouellet, 2002).

Although there is no federal law that explicitly forbids discrimination and harassment of LGBT students in schools, case law has drawn on the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 to establish legal protections against certain types of sexual harassment based on sexual orientation. In the case filed by Jamie Nabozny (Nabozny v. Podlesny) in Ashland, Wisconsin in 1995, the 7th Circuit Court found school officials violated a student's right to equal protection when they failed to respond to his continued complaints of harassment based on perceived sexual orientation differently than they responded to other types of harassment (Advocates for Children of New York, 2005). Unfortunately, a similar case in Iowa in 2004 concluded that a student's equal protection rights were not violated if school officials take any action to counter the harassment (Advocates for Children of New York, 2005).

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 forbids discrimination on the basis of sex in schools receiving federal funds and in 1997 the Department of Education determined Title IX also covers sexual harassment. In 1998 the Supreme Court ruled that a school district that knowingly ignores teacher-to-student or student-to-student sexual harassment may be liable for monetary damages. Case law indicates claimants must show that school officials knew, and were deliberately indifferent to the harassment, and also must show the harassment "is so severe, pervasive and objectively offensive that it can be said to deprive the victims of access to the educational opportunities and benefits provided by the schools" (Davis v. Monroe Board of Education, cited in Advocates for Children of New York, 2005, p. 13).

Under Wisconsin's pupil nondiscrimination law, section 118.13, Wis. Stats, no pupil may be excluded from a public school, or from any school activities or programs, or be denied any benefits or treated in a different manner because of his or her sexual orientation, or on the basis of 13 other protected classes such as sex, race, or religion. The law and related Administrative Code, PI 9 require every Wisconsin school district to develop policies prohibiting discrimination, adopt a written procedure to receive and resolve pupil discrimination complaints, designate an employee to receive complaints and disseminate this information to students and their parents/guardians. The law requires each school district to submit to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) an annual pupil nondiscrimination and educational equity report identifying the designated district employee to receive complaints of discrimination, the number of complaints received during the year, a description of each complaint and its status. The statute does not provide protection on the basis of gender identity/expression. At the present time DPI reports it does not have sufficient resources to provide technical assistance to school districts to effectively implement the pupil nondiscrimination law.

The Madison Metropolitan School District created a full-time position of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning resource teacher in 2001. The purpose of the position is to improve the academic achievement, emotional security and personal acceptance of LGBTQ students and staff and to be a source of support and information to all students. This position has responsibility for instituting district-wide staff development on anti-harassment and safety issues related to sexual orientation, addressing the barriers to academically successful and safe environments, and responding in crisis situations relating to harassment and LGBTQ issues.

### **LGBTQ Youth Groups**

In addition to school-based GSAs, some communities have community-based LGBTQ youth groups providing after-school youth development programming for LGBTQ youth and their allies. Currently community-based LGBTQ youth groups exist in Appleton, Eau Claire, Green Bay, La Crosse, Madison, Milwaukee and Schofield and are affiliated with various host organizations including Goodwill Industries, AIDS service organizations, YWCA and youth-serving organizations. These programs served an estimated 975 unduplicated young people at the end of 2005, with groups serving a median of 16 youth per week (Cox, 2006). Each community-based LGBTQ youth group works to address seven essential components or program "pillars" for effective youth development programming for LGBTQ youth. These pillars include strategies to build friends and relationships, group responsibility, engaging experiences, safe space, prevention skills, links to other community organizations, and organizational structure.

## Faith Communities

Participation in a faith community is an important part of the life of many youth (Smith et al, 1996). It is within the enormous diversity of faith traditions and even among congregations within certain denominations, that individuals, congregations, and denominations struggle with complex personal and societal issues and expressions of faith and support. In general, faith communities have been slow to support fully and publicly LGBTQ youth as evidenced by policies and practices, local giving, ordination opportunities, sexuality education, social justice activities, or other forms of support, if they provide any support at all. Religious traditions such as Unitarian Universalism (UU), United Church of Christ (UCC) and Reconstructionist Judaism provide exceptions as they support justice and equity for people of all sexual orientations. With regard to education supportive of LGBTQ youth, some UU and UCC congregations in Wisconsin include *Our Whole Lives*, a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum that recognizes homosexuality, bisexuality, and heterosexuality as natural orientations in the range of human sexual experience.

## LGBT Communities

Some people think of, and refer to, the LGBT community as “family,” acknowledging the important sense of connectedness and belonging shared by LGBT people, especially when emotional and material supports were not always provided by biological families. The social landscape has changed in the past 35 years with many young LGBTQ youth receiving support from their biological families and others, which in turn may be reducing the perception of LGBT communities as “family” to many in this younger generation. However, there remain far too many young people who are disconnected from meaningful relationships, a grounding sense of their history and a motivating hope for the future for whom connections to LGBT communities could provide critical support. For many youth, LGBT communities may introduce them to greater social diversity in terms of economic class, ethnicity or religion than they had experienced before identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

There are other generational differences between LGBTQ youth and adults. The world experienced by youth in 2006 is radically different than it was for adults who lived through the early years of the gay rights movement, the women’s movement, and the early years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Young people may not understand or appreciate the accomplishments of the LGBT movement that have occurred in a relatively short time. Young people today have vastly different experiences in terms of coming out, access to information as a result of the Internet, and methods of communication which include use of cell phones, instant messaging, and email. These and other differences in experiences challenge communication and understanding among the different cohorts of LGBT individuals.

The perception and experience of LGBT adults is instructive for youth. Like most other adults in Wisconsin, LGBT adults want equity and access to primary and preventive health services; assurance of sensitive and effective alcohol and other substance abuse interventions; reduction of existing, emerging, and re-emerging communicable diseases; and, elimination of barriers to address mental health issues, while simultaneously depathologizing homosexuality. But currently, these common goals are unlikely to be achieved for LGBT people. There are several reasons for this including homophobia, discrimination, insensitive or inadequate resources, and lack of awareness about the needs of LGBT people. LGBT people in Wisconsin continue to experience hate crimes, harassment, discrimination, and marginalization in the workplace and elsewhere.

At the same time, LGBT adults often engage in high risk behaviors as coping strategies for the discrimination and isolation they feel in their community. This can include drinking, high risk sexual behavior, protecting themselves by assimilating and hiding their identity, or conversely, engaging in confrontation rather than engagement with people. HIV and AIDS have also greatly affected this community. Approximately 59% of people in Wisconsin who have AIDS are men who have sex with men. Although this percentage has gone down since the first years of HIV, gay and bisexual men are still the largest group affected by this disease. Nationally, the prevalence of HIV infection among young urban men who have sex with men (MSM) aged 15-22 sampled in seven U.S. cities was 7.2% (MMWR Weekly, 2001).

Also, despite the excellent work and continuing efforts of many individuals and groups, LGBT communities across the state lack sufficient infrastructure to more fully develop a vision of healthy development. They are not equipped to translate that vision into practical action, to advocate for resources when necessary, or to measure improvements as they are achieved. Youth in community-based LGBT youth programs indicate they are concerned about the lack of healthy venues and activities in which LGBT adults can engage. They are also pointing to the need for LGBT communities across the state to come together, articulate a vision for healthy development, and move toward that vision with passion and commitment.

Additional institutions exert their influence on LGBTQ youth through their impact on organizations that provide more direct services to youth.

## Capacity-building Organizations

A few capacity-building organizations are particularly important in providing support for LGBTQ youth, but their impact is mediated by organizations that directly serve LGBTQ youth.

**Diverse and Resilient, Inc.** was formed 1995 as a capacity-building program to meet the HIV prevention needs of LGBT youth by increasing the number and effectiveness of community-based groups supporting

LGBTQ youth. The program provides mini-grants, consultations, and leadership training so that LGBT youth have access to the same quality of programming that other youth have. In its ten year history Diverse and Resilient has supported development of a network of community-based groups (RAY) to support the needs of LGBT youth, provided training to build skills of professional youth development specialists, and generated hundreds of thousands of dollars to support LGBT youth organizations. Further, Diverse and Resilient expanded its services to address the needs of LGBT adult communities in 2002.

**LYDAC, The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth Development Advisory Council**, formed in the fall of 1998 to plan a Future Search conference and brought together almost 100 stakeholders in Wisconsin to focus on the needs of LGBT youth. Since that time the group of approximately 12 individuals has continued to meet twice per year as a voluntary and informal strategic planning group focusing on the needs of LGBT youth in Wisconsin. LYDAC provides guidance to Diverse and Resilient, and associated programs, including professional development activities for youth development specialists, youth leadership training events, and other programs for LGBT youth. Among LYDAC's accomplishments was a review of the youth development literature from which LYDAC articulated a Wisconsin LGBTQ Youth Development Model including seven program pillars that characterize RAY youth development programs for Wisconsin LGBTQ youth. This framework was introduced to youth and youth development specialists attending the 2001 HIV Prevention Institute and continues to provide a useful framework for program planning and documentation of best practices.

**The Rainbow Alliance for Youth (RAY)** is a statewide network of eight community-based groups supporting LGBT youth in Wisconsin communities. Its origin can be traced back to the second Wisconsin conference for school- and community-based HIV peer educators held in 1997 when program advisors recognized the need to focus HIV prevention resources more specifically on young gay men, a population disproportionately affected by HIV. The rationale for community-based LGBTQ youth groups was two-fold. First, one way to reach young gay men (and thus to be able to provide HIV prevention messages) is to reach their friends and peers. In practice, this meant that to reach young gay men it would be important to have community-based groups for young LGBTQ youth and their allies in communities throughout Wisconsin. Second, an effective HIV prevention strategy is to support the healthy development of youth – not only in terms of physical health, but also in terms of social, emotional, and vocational domains of health. In the way that 4-H, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and other organizations support the development of youth, RAY programs strive to support the development of LGBTQ youth.

Over the last eight years RAY has evolved and now builds capacity, enhances leadership, and builds

collaborations to provide comprehensive programs addressing the needs of LGBT youth including HIV prevention, education about social justice and fun and engaging youth-focused activities. RAY member organizations share common features, yet each program is unique. As a member organization each RAY group works to address seven program “pillars” for effective youth development programming for LGBTQ youth. Youth development specialists attend two trainings per year to increase their understanding of these pillars and apply these concepts to their individual RAY programs. An important aspect of the organizational structure pillar is the development and adoption of policies to guide program implementation. To date RAY policy guidance has been developed for safe space, substance and tobacco use, and youth-adult relationships.

**GLSEN – South Central Wisconsin (GLSEN-SCW)** is a capacity-building education organization working to create safe schools for LGBT students. Its programs are intended to make anti-LGBT bullying, harassment and name-calling unacceptable in schools and to encourage educators to create schools where all students fully participate. GLSEN-SCW works in partnership with students and school staff to support development of student-led GSAs and has been highly successful in supporting the creation of approximately 70 GSAs in Wisconsin. In addition to providing technical assistance and consultation to students and staff in schools, GLSEN-SCW conducts leadership training events for youth and adults and in the spring of 2005 co-hosted a *Safe Schools, Safe Communities* conference attended by 130 educators, community members, and students to highlight lessons learned about effective school-based and community-based groups supporting LGBTQ youth.

### **State Government Agencies**

The Wisconsin AIDS/HIV Program and the Wisconsin HIV Prevention Community Planning Council have long recognized the importance of HIV prevention interventions targeting young men who have sex with men. The Wisconsin HIV Prevention Community Planning Council, a diverse body that provides guidance about priority populations and recommended interventions to the State AIDS/HIV Program, has endorsed the concept of community-based LGBTQ youth development programs as an effective HIV prevention strategy. The State AIDS/HIV Program has provided significant capacity-building funding to Diverse and Resilient which in turn has provided training, technical assistance, consultation and mini-grants to local LGBTQ youth groups. Particularly noteworthy has been major sponsorship of the multiple-day residential Wisconsin Youth HIV Prevention Institutes held biannually on the UW-Whitewater campus for LGBTQ youth and allies, as well as youth development specialists.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) is influential in a number of ways. It coordinates administration of the Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey, the major statewide survey assessing assets and

risks among high school youth. As discussed above, this survey excludes questions about sexual orientation. The DPI has denied requests to include such questions and in 2003 discontinued inclusion of a question regarding harassment related to perceived sexual orientation.

The DPI did request the CDC to analyze a data set that provided a proxy for sexual orientation, and these findings have been useful in developing the profile of LGBTQ youth in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin DPI is an important source of professional development training for Wisconsin educators and the DPI website is an important source of information for parents and other community members. For more than a decade the DPI has not had sufficient funding to hire a human growth and development (HGD), or sexuality education, consultant to its Student Services, Prevention and Wellness team. To date DPI has not conducted any trainings specifically focusing on LGBTQ youth, nor has it added LGBT links to its website. The DPI has been the primary source of technical assistance related to the Pupil Nondiscrimination statute. With elimination of the Equity team there appears to be less DPI technical assistance available to respond to crisis calls related to discrimination complaints. In addition, it appears there is less attention to district enforcement of nondiscrimination statutes and policies. The DPI has provided significant funding over the years for the Wisconsin HIV Prevention Institute and for LGBTQ program evaluation.

### **Universities**

Two UW campus programs provide professional development opportunities to enhance the knowledge and skills of educators, youth service workers, social workers, clergy and other professionals to work more effectively with LGBTQ youth. The UW-Madison Department of Professional Development and Applied Studies regularly sponsors a one-day professional development workshop on youth development related to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth. In 2005 the UW-Milwaukee Youth Work Learning Center and Diverse and Resilient collaborated to develop a 40-hour Youth Development Specialist Certificate Program. This program increased the understanding and skills of youth development specialists on a range of relevant topics, including adolescent development and sexual identity development, youth development programs and organizations, program evaluation, and professional development and career planning. The 40 hour certificate program was completed by about half of the RAY youth development specialists. University of Wisconsin campuses (including Milwaukee and Madison) provide pre-professional multidisciplinary certificate programs in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Studies for undergraduate students.

### **Foundations**

In addition to governmental funding sources, local foundations are also influential in supporting programming for LGBTQ youth. The Greater Milwaukee Foundation, one of the oldest and largest community foundations in the world, has provided grants to Diverse and Resilient and

the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center. The Wisconsin AIDS Fund is a volunteer-led fund within the Greater Milwaukee Foundation that distributes support to programs and organizations throughout Wisconsin that promote HIV/AIDS education and prevention. Diverse and Resilient, the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center, and selected RAY groups have been recipients of these funds.

The Cream City Foundation is a community-based philanthropic foundation that provides charitable grants to programs and projects that improve the quality of life for LGBT communities in southeastern Wisconsin. The foundation has recently started a series of programs to help increase funding to the LGBT community. In particular, an LGBT Summit was held in the fall of 2005 to provide a forum for LGBT serving organizations to talk about their programs and as a way for local foundations to inform LGBT serving organizations of their funding priorities and procedures.

Other important foundations include the Brico Fund, the Johnson and Pabst LGBT Humanity Fund, New Harvest, Wisconsin Community Foundation, and the Madison Community Foundation. The Wisconsin Partnership Fund for a Healthy Future (University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health) has provided funding to Diverse and Resilient which made possible a statewide health survey of LGBT people. United Way provides funding to local LGBTQ organizations in communities throughout Wisconsin. In addition, AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs), including AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin and AIDS Network have provided important support for youth groups over the years. ARCW continues to provide funding to support two RAY groups.

### **Other Societal Influences**

Other societal influences also indirectly influence, both in positive and detrimental ways, the development of LGBTQ youth. It is impossible to assess the specific impact of these various influences, as all are mediated by so many other factors. Young people are developing in an era in which they receive conflicting messages. In general, they feel supported by family and friends. They likely know openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adults and hear about openly gay and lesbian politicians. They know about the same-sex marriage debates, and are surrounded by media attention to LGBT people.

The combination of anti-gay rhetoric, the treatment of LGBT people as objects of debate, and the media's revival of old stereotypes contribute to a persistent anti-gay climate and stressful conditions in which LGBT people feel under siege (Russell, 2004). While LGBT youth attend school, work, contribute to society, and participate in many organizations and institutions in the broader society, they often do not enjoy the social and environmental supports of their heterosexual peers. Youth sexuality in general and LGBT youth sexuality in particular is increasingly commodified and marketed. Systems of bias and discrimination have led to situations that are still hostile to LGBT youth. The effects of societal homophobia continue

to persist, resulting, for example, in the characterization of work in the healthy development of LGBT youth as “recruiting youths to be gay.”

### SECTION 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

Cultural competence can be defined as “the ability of individuals and systems to work or respond effectively across cultures in a way that acknowledges and respects the culture of the person or organization being served” (Williams 2001). This concept is useful in considering the various ways in which support can be provided for LGBT youth. Many models of cultural competency have been articulated in recent years, including a widely disseminated model developed by Cross and colleagues and used by the National Center for Cultural Competence at Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development (Cross et al, 1989; National Center for Cultural Competence). This model describes a six stage continuum of cultural competency at the organizational level that is also applicable to individuals. When adapted and applied to LGBT youth as a culture, this model not only describes a range of possible responses and reactions, but more important, provides a framework to identify actions individuals and organizations can take to support the healthy development of LGBT youth.

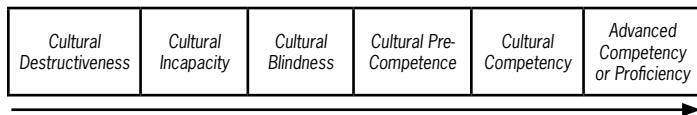


Figure 2: Cultural Competency Continuum Related to LGBT Youth Development

As seen in Figure 2, the continuum of cultural competency applied to LGBT youth includes the following stages:

**Cultural Destructiveness** – This is the most negative end of the continuum and is characterized by attitudes, policies, structures and practices within a system or organization that intentionally reject or harm LGBT youth. At this stage support could be provided to LGBT youth by providing protection.

**Cultural Incapacity** – This stage of the continuum is characterized by an inability to respond effectively to the needs and interests of LGBT youth, including avoiding their existence. Examples include institutional bias, subtle messages that LGBT youth are neither valued nor welcomed, and lower expectations for LGBT youth than for other youth. At this stage support could be provided to LGBT youth by questioning the status quo and increasing awareness and skills through training.

**Cultural Blindness** – At this stage of the continuum all youth are viewed the same, with policies that encourage assimilation, delivery of services that ignore LGBT cultural strengths, and attitudes that only tolerate LGBT youth and blame LGBT youth for their circumstances. At this stage support could be provided to LGBT youth by acquiring

training and enforcing policies that protect LGBT youth.

**Cultural Pre-Competence** – At this stage of the continuum differences are recognized and organizations begin to address the needs of LGBT youth. Additional support could be provided by training to better understand LGBT youth and their needs.

**Cultural Competency** – At this stage, LGBT youth are accepted, appreciated, and valued. Individuals and organizations work to improve services to meet the needs of LGBT youth. Additional support could be provided by publicly valuing LGBT youth and enhancing services for these young people.

**Advanced Cultural Competency or Cultural Proficiency** – At this end of the continuum individuals and organizations move beyond accepting and appreciating LGBT youth and begin to educate others, conduct research to improve programming for LGBT youth, share knowledge and skills about best practices to serve LGBT youth, act as advocates for this population, and build the capacity of other organizations as they progress along the cultural competence continuum relative to LGBT youth.

The cultural competency continuum provides a framework to identify opportunities to increase the cultural competency of individuals and organizations to support the healthy development of LGBT youth. Movement along the continuum by individuals and organizations may involve learning more about LGBT youth, developing skills to support these young people, and taking additional steps to change the environment in which these youth are developing. The following is an initial list of recommended strategies and actions to contribute to the positive development of LGBT youth in Wisconsin. Readers are encouraged to reflect, discuss, and add to this list of recommendations and then in partnership with others become motivated to take action to support the positive youth development of Wisconsin’s LGBT youth. Readers are encouraged not only provide minimal support to these young people, but to courageously move along the cultural competence continuum to provide significant and long-lasting support for LGBT youth in Wisconsin.

#### Parents, Peers, and Partners:

- Share values and teach life skills, including problem-solving and goal-setting.
- Intervene in bullying situations to make families and peer groups safe spaces for all, educate on the consequences of bullying, and assist youth in navigating systems intended for their support.
- Learn about adolescent development, including sexual identity development to provide appropriate and supportive parenting.
- Assist youth with their perception of the expanded life options that are available to them. Challenge the stereotypic view of LGBT people as white, middle-class consumers.
- Become culturally competent with regard to LGBTQ

youth culture.

### **Schools, Youth Groups, Faith Communities, and Other Community-based Organizations:**

- Address gaps in data by collecting relevant health and risk information from LGBT youth and make it broadly available to policy makers.
- Implement existing nondiscrimination laws and policies. Support school staff and students in learning to recognize and interrupt discrimination and harassment.
- Support development of Gay Straight Alliances in high schools and middle schools.
- Hire youth program advisors knowledgeable about youth development programming for LGBT youth, or who are willing to learn.
- Support opportunities for professional development related to LGBT youth for staff who work with youth.
- Provide funding and other support for community-based LGBT youth groups.
- Challenge faith communities to support LGBT people throughout their entire lives.
- Notice the presence of heterosexual allies and encourage them to take public stands in support of LGBT individuals and their rights.
- Take on the responsibility of serving as role models for LGBT youth that assist with the transition to physically and emotionally healthy adulthood.
- Assist youth with their perception of the expanded life options that are available to them. Challenge the stereotypic views of what it means to be an LGBT youth or adult; encourage psychological independence so as to not be constrained by stereotypes and expectations.
- Challenge LGBT adult complacency, resignation and view that the current situation is “as good as it gets.”
- Encourage charitable giving, including by LGBT people, to programs that support LGBT youth.
- Support local efforts to conduct needs assessments to identify specific challenges facing LGBT youth, as well as existing resources to support positive youth development.
- Develop and provide educational programs for parents, educators and others who work with youth.
- Teach students to critically analyze media that portray stereotypes about LGBT people being in service to straight people.

### **Capacity-building Organizations, State Government, Universities, Foundations and Other Societal Institutions:**

- Provide pre-service teachers with information about LGBT youth and strategies to make schools safe and welcoming places for all students to learn.
- Increase professional development opportunities related to LGBT youth for educators, social workers and other youth-serving professionals.
- Increase or reallocate resources within DPI to provide technical assistance to schools related to student nondiscrimination protections.
- Include questions in the Wisconsin YRBS to learn more about LGBT youth.
- Continue to fund programs to support LGBT youth.
- Fund programs for LGBT youth that focus on resiliency and youth development rather than disease prevention.
- Provide funding to build sustainability of programs, particularly in view of the unique needs of LGBT youth and their current dependence on LGBT programs with inadequate resources.
- Collaborate with organizations addressing other systems that diminish individuals’ aspirations and options, including racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression.

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## APPENDIX A

### ACRONYMS

**ASO** AIDS Service Organization

**CDC** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, federal government's lead agency supporting the health of US residents

**D&R** Diverse and Resilient, Inc., a capacity-building non-profit organization supporting the healthy development of LGBT people

**DPI** Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, the state education agency

**FtM/MtF** Female to Male or Male to Female transgender persons

**GSA** Gay Straight Alliance – student club

**GLSEN-SCW** Gay, Lesbian, Straight Educators Network – South Central Wisconsin, an organization working to create safe schools for LGBTQ students and staff.

**HGD** Human Growth and Development, a term that refers to sexuality education

**LGB** Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual

**LGBT** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender

**LGBTQ** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Questioning, a term used to describe sexual minority youth

**LYDAC** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth Development Advisory Council, a voluntary organization of individuals who meet to think strategically on issues related to LGBTQ youth

**MSM** Men who have Sex with Men

**PFLAG** Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays, a national organization with local chapters promoting the health and well-being of LGBT individuals and their families

**PTA** Parent Teacher Association

**PTO** Parent Teacher Organization

**RAY** Rainbow Alliance for Youth, a statewide network of community-based LGBTQ youth groups

**STI** Sexually Transmitted Infection

**UCC** United Church of Christ

**UU** Unitarian Universalist

**WI YRBS** Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey, the Wisconsin version of a national survey facilitated by DPI

**YDS** Youth Development Specialists, program advisors in local RAY programs

**YRBS** Youth Risk Behavior Survey, a national survey sponsored by the CDC