

The following is the recommendation of the LGBTQ2 Focus Group for the State Prevention Enhancement Grant considering the assessed needs and the potential services perceived as necessary to provide substance abuse prevention to the LGBTQ2 population. First and foremost it is recommended that prevention be provided in the view of promoting healthy lifestyles. Through the promotion of healthy choices we would discourage detrimental choices of harmful and addictive substance use among youth and young adults. In addition, the focus group feels it is necessary to indicate that LGBTQ2 is not synonymous with substance use or abuse.

Need for research:

The first recommendation of the focus group is with regards to statistical research regarding substance use within special population areas. It is our understanding that the OPNA survey done in the schools provides detailed information regarding substance use among youth, however, there is no data that specifically focuses on the LGBTQ2 population to compare rates of usage. **Therefore, it is our recommendation that a survey be conducted within the LGBTQ2 community to obtain reliable data to better focus prevention efforts.**

Fear, Prejudice, Rejection and Isolation:

The work group identified what we feel is the number one reason substance abuse exists within the LGBTQ2 population and that focuses on fear and prejudice, rejection and isolation. Often youth are not only afraid of what they will encounter, but others are afraid of LGBTQ2 youth, often out of ignorance. This then leads youth to being rejected, and rejection comes in many forms, from schools, professionals, faith based communities and even family members. This in turn isolates these individuals and with nowhere to turn may find themselves abusing substances to cope, or worse.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of this group to have required educational opportunities for schools, government officials, RPC's, and other professionals that work with this population in order to reduce the fear and prejudice of the LGBTQ2 population. It is necessary to break down the barriers within the community through education and awareness in order to increase cultural competency in regards to the LGBTQ2 population. There should be no tolerance for forcing an individual's negative beliefs on others.

In addition we recommend educational opportunities to be offered for parents, family members, faith based groups and the community at large offering factual information regarding the LGBTQ2 population. The promotion of parent support groups such as PFLAG is necessary to let people know there is help out there and to reduce the isolation of these youth. Advertisement and

promotional materials regarding prevention of substance abuse within the LGBTQ2 youth is desired. One example of advertisement to encourage open dialogue on the subject of LGBTQ2 community has been initiated in the Northeast area of Oklahoma with billboards that simply say "Someone you know and love is gay".

Access to Substances:

One specific area of concern raised by the focus group is that of access to substances. It is the consensus of the group that it is necessary to limit access to substances such as tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs and other harmful substances to youth. One way to do this is to make an impact on the overall attitude towards these elements within the environment of the community.

We recommend the creation of peer focused groups to raise awareness and assist in the design of media, brochures, and advertisements specifically tailored to the LGBTQ2 population. We feel it is necessary that this information also be research and evidence based materials that relate to and can be disseminated to the LGBTQ2 population. In order to implement this recommendation we believe money will need to be allocated towards the creation of and implementation of media. We also believe it would be beneficial to base the peer groups of youth on the Gay Straight Alliances currently in many schools and supported through Resource Prevention Center facilitators providing necessary information and resources.

Conservative Media:

Another area of concern within the focus group was the prevalence of conservative media which does not accurately depict this special interest group. The message that is often heard through the use of conservative media is perceived as hate driven out of ignorance and therefore potentially leads to rejection and isolation of individuals. **Therefore it is the recommendation of this group that all promotional materials and substance abuse resources portray the LGBTQ2 community in a positive and factual manner in which individuals within this populations find relatable. In addition, positive media use is desired that will counter the conservative negative messages.**

Rite of Passage:

During discussions within the focus group it was determined that one reason many youth turn to substance use and abuse, is because it is seen as a rite of passage or as part of the culture. If the only place they feel accepted or see others being accepted is at a bar then the rite of passage becomes going to the bar and alcohol consumption is seen as a normal and accepted behavior. There are no or extremely limited alternatives for socialization among the LGBTQ2 youth. However, if something is put

in the place of the bar, such as a “Gay Prom” or another alternative that is welcoming and alcohol, tobacco and drug free, then this event would recreate a rite of passage for these youth.

Therefore it is the recommendation of this group to build relationships with non-bar locations to offer welcoming locations for LGBTQ2 youth to socialize. It is also essential to educate community based organizations in how the organization can be more inclusive and welcoming to all youth and help the organizations to create events that promote inclusiveness. We as a group would like to see the creation of a list of restaurants, sporting events, retail stores and other public locations that are willing to say they treat all people equally and with the same respect as everyone else. One example might be the “Breathe Easy” stickers saying a place is smoke free and then compiling a list of those places only in this regard it would be everyone, even LGBTQ2, are welcome here. These “safe havens” could also indicate they are a safe, drug free, tobacco free, alcohol free location in addition to being a welcoming place for youth and young adults. It is highly recommended to find better ways of promoting these events and locations. Collaboration with Dr. Meredith Worthen of the University of Oklahoma and “The Welcoming Project” might be a good starting point.

Social Norms:

This group has identified the need to change the prevalence of the social norm which indicates substance use within the LGBTQ2 community. **It is the recommendation to alter this social norm through increased educational opportunities within the LGBTQ2 population. One example is a workshop offered at the Oklahoma Equality Center in Tulsa called a “Coming Out Workshop” which discusses the pressures of self-identifying as LGBTQ2 and the pressure which could lead to substance use. It is important to indicate that not all LGBTQ2 individuals are using substances for sexual practices, coping, or peer pressure.**

Religious abuse:

This work group also identified a cause of substance abuse to be linked to religious abuse. Religious abuse is the act of a religious entity condemning individuals, promoting hate and a non-welcoming environment. **Therefore, it is the recommendation of this group that connections be created with welcoming congregations and collaborating with these congregations to offer identified welcoming and inclusive safe havens for the LGBTQ2 population. We recommend education and resources to be offered to faith based organizations as a start towards building relationships between the LGBTQ2 population and religious institutions.**

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In summation, the recommendations made by this work group focus on the need for educational and promotional materials that are relevant to the LGBTQ2 population and focus on not only substance abuse but also the risk factors that can lead to substance use. Primarily, the most prevalent risk factor comes from the fear, prejudice, rejection and isolation that can be derived through a variety of areas within the environment of not just the LGBTQ2 community but that of everyone. Collaborative efforts are required to reduce this risk factor and to build relationships to secure a better life, one through healthy choices, for all youth in Oklahoma. We would like to see this provided in a holistic approach, just as a child has many spheres of influence, it is our desire that a multifaceted approach to prevention would encompass these influences whether it be media, parents, schools, peers or any other stimuli that can be utilized to deliver a message of a healthy lifestyles without the use of tobacco, alcohol or drugs.

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