

## HRC "Time to THRIVE" Conference

February 12 - 14, 2016

Marriott's Gaylord Texan Resort & Conference Center, Grapevine, Texas

I was fortunate to attend the Fourth Annual HRC "Time to THRIVE" Conference. This is the second time I've attended this conference and each time I learn something new. Unfortunately, not all of what I learn is uplifting news. For all the attempts to provide a safe environment for members of the LGBTQ community, there are those who are intent on continuing their assault on members of the community, particularly those who are Transgender. This time two of my colleagues, Josie Meza Malik and Elizabeth Maloney, also attended the "Time to THRIVE" Conference. This report summarizes our experiences at the conference.

What is wonderful about this conference is the diversity of those who attend: educators, social workers, politicians, counselors, and others who interact with the LGBTQ community and who are dedicated to "Promoting safety, inclusion and well-being for LGBTQ Youth...EVERYWHERE!" The event receives sponsorship from such organizations as the American Counseling Association, AT & T, BBVA Compass, and our "Mothership," the NEA. I mention the sponsorship because they make it possible for as many as possible to attend the conference by providing scholarships for registration which reduce the cost from \$249.00 to \$49.00. I was fortunate to receive a scholarship for the second year in a row. Josie and Elizabeth were also recipients of scholarships.

Those who participate in the conference run the gamut from teenagers to senior citizens. Workshops Tracks fall under three categories/themes, in addition to general interest topics offered. The three categories/themes are:

- 1) HIV & AIDS Awareness & Prevention
- 2) Intersectionality
- 3) Transgender and Gender-Expansive Youth

The sessions we attended included the following:

"A Place In The Middle: Indigenous Perspectives on Gender Diversity, Cultural Safety, and Empowerment." Presenters; Dean Hamer, Director Qwaves Films and Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu, Campaign Spokesperson, A Place in the Middle Campaign.

This was an outstanding and very moving presentation. Hina is a MTF Transgender of Hawaiian heritage. Her story, and that of the Hawaiian dance troupe she trains, focuses on acceptance for all, as well as the promotion of indigenous culture. As stated in the description of the presentation: "This workshop honors a legacy of culturally-safe gender & sexual identities long before colonialism interrupted Indigenous ways of being."

We were moved by the expression of Indigenous culture through dance and song as well as the acceptance of a young Hawaiian girl who dreamed of leading the boys' hula troupe and was allowed to do so. We could all learn more from the Indigenous cultures who are more accepting, respectful, and even honor individuals who have "two spirits"! PBS Learning Media has produced a film titled, "A Place in the Middle." Copies of the film were made available to attendees.

Other sessions we attended included:

"Safe Conversations: Listening to Our Students' Codes." I had expected more from this session than was delivered. The description stated the following would be covered:

"This workshop will help teachers, school counselors and other support staff identify resources, language, and opportunities by which to support students...."

Unfortunately, I, Dorothy, was still left wanting "more" from this session! As an educator, I believe this is a topic that needs to be addressed if we are to provide a welcome environment for LGBTQ students....especially those who are Transgender or Transitioning. Although this session did not offer me the information I sought, I was able to get more material and information that will help me be a better advocate/ally for my students at the "Asterisk Trans\* Conference I attended on Saturday, February 27, 2016 at UC Riverside.

Given the fact several of our members at the Winter 2016 CCA Conference responded to the question, "What diversity-themed workshops would you like to see at future conferences?" by stating there is a need to address non-gender binary students and LGBT students and faculty, I am determined to have a session at one of our forthcoming CCA Conferences that addresses these issues.

\*\*at UCR I attended two sessions conducted by Willy Wilkinson, MPH, and a FTM Transgender who has written a book titled, Born on the Edge of Race and Gender: A Voice for Cultural Competency". He would be a wonderful speaker to address these issues! He lives in the Bay area so he's local!

The third session attended was:

"Dangerous Therapy - Advocacy to Prohibit So-Called "Conversion Therapy." I learned that very few states outlaw these dangerous and discredited practices that falsely claim to "change a young person's sexual orientation or gender identity." The lifelong harm, including depression, anxiety, drug use, and suicide, is staggering!

Although I, Dorothy, am a member of the LGBTQ community and an Ally, I still find I have much to learn. One would think there is more acceptance and understanding, which would make it "easier" for the youth of today to be their genuine selves. Unfortunately, what I learned at both "Time to THRIVE" and again at the UC Riverside "Asterisk Trans\* Conference" is this: although laws have been instituted that have given the LGBTQ community more rights, the bullying still exists. In fact, the more overt anti-gay bullying has increased and is focused on the Transgender community! All the more reason I feel passionate about providing our members information on the LGBT Community with an emphasis on the Transgender population.

Next year the HRC "Time to THRIVE" Conference will be held in Nashville, Tennessee and we all plan to attend!

Respectfully Submitted,

Dorothy M. Reina, Josie Meza Malik and Elizabeth Maloney