

**NJCASA PRIDE: A Conversation about Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth and Minors**  
***Interview Questions- Extended Version***

**Question #1: Young students across the country, like Nex Benedict, are being abused, bullied, assaulted, and murdered. According to the Trevor Project, nearly two in five LGBTQ+ youth (39%) reported they had been forced to engage in sexual activities against their will at some point in their lives. Additionally, LGBTQ+ youth face higher rates of mental health challenges than their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts. Please share with us your wisdom or advice on how we as Americans, but more importantly stewards of the anti-sexual violence movement, should be viewing and engaging with LGBTQ+ youth and minors.**

Jesselly (Latino Action Network Foundation)

- Response - Love is love. I see my role as a steward of the anti-sexual violence movement as a way of putting love into action to combat hate and violence. And, to me, queer youth need more and more of our love in action. I hope everyone who commits to NJCASA sees themselves as a trauma steward because we witness firsthand the stigma, rejection, and injustice that sexual assault/abuse survivors experience from the legal system, their families, and communities. As a trauma steward, we must be prepared to step out of our comfort zone. Any person who live in fear of being abused or attacked because of who they are, like so many LGBTQIA2S children and adolescents, should be at the center of the anti-sexual violence movement.

Ashante (You Are More Than)

- Response - LGBTQ+ Affirming care is sexual violence prevention care when it comes to supporting youth we interact with every day. As helpers, we should be seeing LGBTQIA+ youth as kids who are deserving of love and care...period. They are still young people who need to be poured into and I think sometimes people get so distracted by the fact that the youth is being their authentic self that they forget that they have a youth in front of them in the first place. LGBTQ+ youth and minors should not be penalized and hated for who they truly are; they should be guided, uplifted, and supported.

Elizabeth (Hudson Pride Center)

- Response - Viewing and engaging with LGBTQ+ youth and minors requires a compassionate and proactive approach, especially in the context of addressing sexual violence and mental health challenges they disproportionately face. Here are a few ways we adults can be supportive. First, we should always listen and believe them. It's crucial to believe their stories and validate their feelings without judgment. We must create safe and supportive environments where LGBTQ+ youth

feel comfortable sharing their experiences. Secondly, educate yourself. Take the time to become educated on LGBTQ+ issues, including the intersectionality of sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual violence. Understanding these dynamics is essential for providing effective support. Thirdly, promote inclusivity in all aspects of life, from schools to community organizations. One way to do this is by ensuring policies and practices are inclusive of LGBTQ+ individuals and address their specific needs and vulnerabilities. Finally, collaborate and coordinate with LGBTQ+ organizations, community leaders, and allies to strengthen support networks and create comprehensive strategies for addressing sexual violence. By viewing LGBTQ+ youth through a lens of empathy, respect, and understanding, and by actively engaging in efforts to support and protect them, we can contribute to creating a safer and more inclusive environment where all young people can thrive free from violence and discrimination.

Kayden (HealingSpace)

- Response - LGBTQ+ individuals are at a significant disadvantage from our non-LGBTQ+ counterparts. As stewards of the anti-sexual violence movement, it is important that we use our platform to educate younger LGBTQ+ folks on the disparities and discrimination that LGBTQ+ individuals have faced throughout history and continue to face today. While the information can be overwhelming and discouraging for anyone to hear, let alone people who identify as LGBTQ+, education is the first step of prevention. Not only is it necessary to teach youth about the disparities in the system but it is also necessary to teach youth preventative measures for the future. Preventative measures do not only look like teaching young folks about how to navigate hate from others, but more importantly how to find love and safety within ourselves.

Quadeer (Brothers Building A Better Nation)

- Response - As Americans and stewards of the anti-sexual violence movement, we must engage with LGBTQ+ youth and minors with the same dedication and compassion as we do with their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts. One of the significant issues is that queer youth, particularly those expressing themselves in ways not traditionally accepted by society, such as a queer male exhibiting traits deemed feminine, often face ostracization. The ability to express oneself authentically is still stigmatized, causing significant pain and suffering. We need stronger protections for queer youth, who are often displaced at very young ages, and more safe spaces where they can find support. Since they are minors, it's crucial to reframe the conversation from their sexual identity to their self-expression. The rampant discrimination faced by youth expressing themselves in non-gender conforming ways, or those labeled as queer or within the LGBTQ+ spectrum, must be addressed. Queer youth are often over-sexualized, leading to victimization. They may be forced into difficult situations due to a lack of support and resources. Therefore, stronger legal protections are needed against parents and caregivers who displace or mistreat these youths. For foster homes and temporary housing

placements, we need more stringent oversight to ensure these are safe spaces when the home environment is not. Lastly, we must shift our perspective from focusing solely on sexual identity to recognizing their full expression as whole individuals and spiritual beings. By seeing them beyond their sexual identity, we can better protect and support them in their journey to express their true selves.

**Question #2: As anti-violence, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive service providers, what more can we do for our LGBTQ+ youth?**

Jesselly (Latino Action Network Foundation)

- Response - As advocates and providers committed to eradicating sexual violence, we must be steadfast and loud about bodily autonomy and self-determination. When I speak with colleagues in the field, I see how often heteronormativity and White privilege prevents even the kindest of providers from being inclusive in their spaces. The rules are set up for a binary world where victims are cis-women and offenders are cis-men. Doing more for LGBTQIA2S children and adolescents would probably look like becoming more political which typically feels outside the scope of social service culture.

Ashante (You Are More Than)

- Response - We can do better at cultivating safe and affirming environments for the youth we serve to thrive in rather than excluding them from care. This can look like ensuring that our resources are inclusive and gender expansive, not having one narrowed viewpoint of how and who should show up as the ideal survivor. This can also look like “calling our community partners in” when doing the work by advocating and ensuring that partner agencies are equipped to serve LGBTQ+ youth. If they are not, refer them to agencies like [You Are More Than Inc.](#) and [Hudson Pride Center](#), to support them in increasing their capacity to serve LGBTQ+ youth. When doing prevention work, we can encourage our community members to get more involved in the youth’s lives through advocacy work (e.g., joining the PTA, getting involved with the school system on a local level, running for school board in your county, or volunteering at your local LGBTQ+ community center). All of these things can drastically improve the lives of the LGBTQ+ youth who come through service providers' doors.

Elizabeth (Hudson Pride Center)

- Response - One of the most important things we can do is amplifying voices and experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in decision-making processes and advocacy efforts. Create opportunities for leadership development and platform their stories to raise awareness and drive change. Another important thing we can do is advocating for policies that protect LGBTQ+ rights and address systemic barriers. This includes

advocating for inclusive school policies, healthcare access, housing protections, and anti-discrimination laws.

Kayden (HealingSpace)

- Response - As service providers, we need to create more safe spaces for LGBTQ+ folks to not only exist in but feel seen, safe, and supported in. We can do more by continuing to educate ourselves and continuing to have conversations with others revolving around the LGBTQ+ community. As providers and agencies with a platform, it is our job to continue to advocate on behalf of the LGBTQ+ community.

Quadeer (Brothers Building A Better Nation)

- Response - As anti-violence, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive service providers, we can better support our LGBTQ+ youth through several key actions. Firstly, we need to humanize individuals who identify as queer or non-heteronormative, starting within communities and homes in a non-threatening manner to prevent further alienation of those who harbor fears about sexual identity. Discussions about sexual identity and orientation are particularly nuanced within BIPOC communities, so it is essential to understand and address the roots of fear and trauma within these communities through focused therapy and community studies. Additionally, we must consider the broader social determinants of health that exacerbate these issues. Historical practices like redlining forced low-income African Americans into cramped living conditions with limited socioeconomic mobility, leading to isolation and a lack of exposure to diverse cultures and better educational opportunities, which may contribute to the fear of non-heteronormative lifestyles. Recognizing that these issues are complex and multilayered, we need to engage deeply with communities, study their behaviors, and understand the cultural or societal norms that contribute to discrimination. Combating ignorance must occur at the local level, as each community's issues are unique. We must be willing to knock on doors, engage directly with community members, and develop strategic plans tailored to the specific cultural and societal norms of each community. By taking these steps, we can create more inclusive and supportive environments for LGBTQ+ youth, addressing both immediate needs and long-term systemic issues.

**Question #3: How do your identities, as part of the LGBTQ+ community, inform the work you do as a steward in this movement?**

Jesselly (Latino Action Network Foundation)

- Response - Racism is so embedded in every system that responds to sexual violence, including the nonprofit organizations that provide the services. Unfortunately, there are few spaces where I could be my whole self as a queer Latina in the social justice space. The intersections of my ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation have been really complex to navigate at work, especially in the

anti-sexual violence movement that is dominated by the voices of White women. However, I use my experiences to inform how I go about training and supervising others in the field and challenge misconceptions about queerness and what that looks like in Latino communities.

Ashante (You Are More Than)

- Response - You Are More Than Inc. (YAMT) is the ONLY national anti-trafficking organization in the United States where LGBTQIA survivors are at the center of our work, embedded into our mission and integral to our leadership team so that we can ensure LGBTQ+ survivors are no longer falling through the cracks. At the core of our work, we challenge the ways the anti-trafficking movement supports, responds and uplifts BIPOC and LGBTQ+ survivors through direct service work, training and technical assistance and advocacy measures. I am a proud queer, black woman, and I am proud of the work we do at YAMT to support queer sex workers and survivors of trafficking.

Elizabeth (Hudson Pride Center)

- Response - I am proud to identify as queer and to lead an organization that is dedicated to advocating for, educating on, and supporting every LGBTQ+ individual who seeks our assistance. Our mission extends beyond mere support; it is about fostering a better, fuller, and more authentic life for every member of our community. Through our advocacy efforts and comprehensive programs, we aim to promote equal rights and ensure that LGBTQ+ individuals have access to the resources they need to thrive. I believe passionately in my work—work that extends beyond saving lives to enriching them. At Hudson Pride, our goal is to empower LGBTQ+ individuals to live authentically, confidently, and without compromise. We strive to create a society where everyone can thrive, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Kayden (HealingSpace)

- Response - My identities have given me the opportunity to have a firsthand understanding of what it is like to exist in a world that does not always recognize and/or value individuals like me. Additionally, my personal experiences have given me the necessary insight regarding needed changes within our society and existing systems. Having these insights allows me to use my platform not only to advocate on behalf of others in the LGBTQ+ community but also to educate others on how to become better supports to those in the LGBTQ+ community.

Quadeer (Brothers Building A Better Nation)

- Response - My identities inform the work I do as a steward in this movement through a triple lens. W.E.B. Du Bois introduced the concept of double consciousness in his 1903 work "The Souls of Black Folk," describing the internal conflict experienced by marginalized or oppressed groups. For African Americans, this means reconciling our African heritage and cultural identity with the

understanding that white Americans often do not recognize us as equals or as fully human. We must come to grips with our identity while acknowledging that the environment we live in can be hostile. Triple consciousness expands on this concept by adding an awareness of one's racial identity, sexual orientation, and the intersections between the two. As the Founder and Executive Director of Brothers Building A Better Nation, I navigate this complexity daily. Many of the young men in my program are heterosexual, and some hold homophobic views. Regardless of their thoughts about my sexual identity, and despite some seeing me as less than, I must reconcile that the people I serve might wish I didn't exist. When writing grants or fundraising, I am also aware that some funders may have reservations about a queer male leading the organization. As a community leader, I must recognize and be cognizant of these dynamics without letting my identity distract from the mission of the organization. To love one's community, one must be willing to sacrifice and risk rejection or ostracization. This burden is heavier for queer individuals due to the demonization of our very being. We often have to perform social and psychological gymnastics to operate in these spaces. The irony is that as social beings, queer people often cherish any sign of recognition or acceptance, no matter how small.

**Question #4: Share with us 3 positive words or phrases to describe LGBTQ+ youth and minors. How do you want the world to see LGBTQ+ youth and minors?**

Jesselly (Latino Action Network Foundation)

- Response - Beautiful. Smart. Human. I hope the world sees LGB\_TQIA2S children and adolescents as deserving of their love, respect, kindness, and outspoken support.

Ashante (You Are More Than)

- Response - Brilliant / Strong / Thoughtful

Elizabeth (Hudson Pride Center)

- Response -

Three positive words or phrases to describe LGBTQ+ youth and minors:

1. **Resilient.**
2. **Authentic.**
3. **Empowered.**

I want the world to see LGBTQ+ youth and minors as:

- **Valued:** Recognizing their inherent worth and contributions to society.
- **Supported:** Providing the necessary support and resources to thrive.
- **Celebrated:** Celebrating their diversity, resilience, and unique perspectives.

It's essential that LGBTQ+ youth are seen not through a lens of stigma or discrimination but through one of affirmation, support, and celebration of their identities and potential

Kayden (HealingSpace)

- Response - Resilient, beautifully vulnerable, unstoppable. I'd love the world to see LGBTQ+ youth just as they are; human, worth loving, advocates for change, powerful, beautiful, and deserving of equitable opportunities.

Quadeer (Brothers Building A Better Nation)

- Response - Love your existence. I want the world to see LGBTQ+ youth and minors as people we have to protect and nurture.

**Question #5: Explain, in your own words, why Trans\* People are people. Additionally, explain how these systems of oppression (patriarchy, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, etc) exclude trans and nonbinary people from society and nurturing communities.**

**\*= encompasses the entire transgender spectrum**

Jesselly (Latino Action Network Foundation)

- Response - Trans\* people have always existed in humanity. It's just that we did not always have the language to express their experiences. I think it's dehumanizing to reject language or access to healthcare for trans\* people.

Ashante (You Are More Than)

- Response - Our systems of care, our world in general, were not set up for trans folk to thrive when as the question states, trans and nonbinary folk are people. Before colonization, many communities recognized multiple genders within their villages and tribes that went beyond the binary of men and women, and for many of these communities, trans and nonbinary individuals were valued and uplifted. Trans folk are people because we all deserve the right to live as our authentic selves within a body that is nurtured, cared for, and loved internally not just externally. When we sit and argue over excluding a whole group of individuals just because society tells you it's difficult to understand, you become the problem rather than being a part of the solution. Trans and nonbinary folk, youth, and elders deserve to be here. Trans and nonbinary folk deserve to not experience violence at the hands of cis-gender folk just because the world sees them as different. Trans and nonbinary folk deserve to grow old well into elderhood and live supportive lives where they are valued, heard, and uplifted in their communities rather than murdered, disregarded, and shamed for being exactly who they are.

#### Elizabeth (Hudson Pride Center)

- Response - Trans\* individuals' identities, experiences, and emotions are intrinsically valid and merit profound respect, recognition, and protection. The journey of being trans\*—encompassing transgender, nonbinary, genderqueer, and other identities—represents a deeply personal exploration of one's gender identity that profoundly influences their self-perception and interactions with the world. Each person's gender identity is an integral aspect of their humanity, deserving of the same dignity and rights afforded to all individuals. Acknowledging the validity of Trans\* identities is crucial for fostering inclusive and affirming environments where individuals can authentically express themselves without fear of stigma or discrimination.

#### Kayden (HealingSpace)

- Response - Identities do not make people any less people, identities just allow room for a better understanding of how others would like to be viewed and respected in the world. Several systems in society have made it evident that they believe trans and non-binary people are “less than” and do not deserve the same resources and support as our non-LGBTQ counterparts. What do all of the following identities have in common; teachers, doctors, therapists, nail technicians, hair stylists, makeup artists, lawyers, etc.? They are all people. They are all people who just hold DIFFERENT identities from our own. Our identities are our superpowers, they are what make us unique and different in all our own ways. Being different is seen as “bad” or “unusual” when different should really be viewed as **beautifully, one of a kind.**

#### Quadeer (Brothers Building A Better Nation)

- Response - Trans people are people because they are living, breathing human beings who deserve love, compassion, and support just like anyone else. Unfortunately, trans people often face exclusion from societal norms and recognition. Throughout human history, marginalized communities have frequently been singled out and used as scapegoats for societal issues. Systems of oppression such as patriarchy, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism actively work to exclude trans and nonbinary people from society and nurturing environments. Patriarchy enforces rigid gender roles and discriminates against those who do not conform, while colonialism and imperialism impose cultural norms that erase diverse gender identities. Capitalism often prioritizes profit over people, leading to systemic barriers in healthcare, employment, and housing for trans individuals. These oppressive systems collectively marginalize trans and nonbinary people, denying them the acceptance and support they need to thrive.