

“Reflective Dialogues”: Empowering Caregivers to Support LGBTQ Youth
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Dr. Elizabeth Ollen, PhD

Licensed Clinical Psychologist

www.elizabethollenphd.com

dr.elizabethollen@gmail.com

Dr. Argelis A. Ortiz, EdD

Senior Consultant for the Foster Together Network (FTN),
an initiative of the Center for Strategic Partnerships

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Reflective Dialogues project achieved its intended goals between October 2024 – January 2025, continuing its mission to empower caregivers and create affirming homes for LGBTQ+ foster youth. Partnering with Aviva Family and Children’s Services, Niños Latinos Unidos (NLU), and Optimist Youth Homes and Family Services, the project hosted eight workshops—four in English and four in Spanish—that brought together 33 dedicated participants. These transformative sessions equipped prospective resource parents with practical tools, affirming strategies, and deeper insights into topics such as sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression. Participants engaged in reflective dialogue to examine their own values and biases, leaving the workshops inspired and empowered to provide unconditional support to any and all foster youth. Feedback from 25 attendees illuminated the program’s life-changing impact, with many highlighting the facilitators’ relatable, lived experiences, and calling the workshops “helpful,” “inspiring,” and “transformative.”

Building on this momentum, the Train the Trainer workshop held in January 2025 marked an exciting new chapter for the project’s expansion. This highly successful session trained five leaders from the above-mentioned host agencies, equipping them with the knowledge and tools to facilitate their own Reflective Dialogues in the coming months. These leaders now carry forward a shared vision, with plans already in motion to implement these impactful workshops within their respective agencies. The ripple effect of this initiative is undeniable, as these new facilitators are set to expand the reach and deepen the impact of the Reflective Dialogues project. Together, through education, empathy, and collaboration, we are creating a future where every LGBTQ youth feels seen, valued, and supported by a community of informed and compassionate caregivers.

This transformative work was made possible thanks to the generous support of the [David Bohnett Foundation](#), whose funding brought this vision to life. This is not just a project—it is a movement, and the momentum continues to grow.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

It is well known that LGBTQ youth are over-represented in the LA County child welfare system and tend to fare worse than their cisgender and heterosexual peers. Foster family agencies (FFAs) in LA County are struggling to adequately support prospective and current resource parents with regards to increasing willingness and competence to serve LGBTQ youth. More efforts and supports are needed to find safe, supportive homes. This proposal seeks to develop, pilot, and measure the effectiveness of an intervention with resource parents/caregivers to improve affirming foster care for LGBTQ youth and subsequently increase permanency. Ultimately, this program aims to contribute to reducing homelessness and improving positive youth outcomes by increasing stability and permanency. By including current resource parents/caregivers, it is anticipated that these families will be more effective at affirming and supporting the LGBTQ youth in their homes and may help reduce possible disruptions in placements. By including prospective resource parents/caregivers, it is anticipated that these families may be more willing and capable to accept a placement of a LGBTQ youth.

SPECIFIC AIMS

The specific aims of the Reflective Dialogues project were as follows:

1. Develop and pilot a manualized program that is accessible to current and prospective resource parents/caregivers, which (1) creates community and support among parents/caregivers, (2) creates a safe space for identifying and exploring areas of concern or challenges for parents/caregivers in supporting LGBTQ youth, and (3) provides concrete skills and information on parenting LGBTQ youth in foster care.
2. Increase current and prospective resource parents/caregivers' *confidence* in their ability to support LGBTQ youth in foster care.
3. Increase current and prospective resource parents/caregivers' *willingness* in their ability to support LGBTQ youth in foster care.
4. Increase current and prospective resource parents/caregivers' *ability/competence* to provide support to LGBTQ youth in foster care.
5. Create a sustaining program, through a "train the trainer" model, to ensure ongoing support of future cohorts of resource parents.

INTERVENTION DESIGN

The Reflective Dialogues project included development and implementation of a two-session intervention (3 hours total) to support prospective and current resource parents willing to foster or currently fostering LGBTQ youth. A total of four workshops were completed - two in English and two in Spanish. Three workshops were hosted on a HIPPA compliant version of Zoom to increase accessibility of parents/caregivers across LA County, and the fourth workshop was held in person to accommodate those participants with a preference of in-person learning. A fifth workshop was completed employing a “train-the-trainer” model, offering a single 90-minute training session for participants who had previously completed/observed the program, with the intention to continue to implement the workshops in the future at their agencies. The goal of the “train-the-trainer” model was to carry forward the project so that it is sustaining past the parameters of this time-limited project. By working to create an accessible model of this program for FFAs and other organizations (i.e., the expertise of a licensed mental health clinician is not required), barriers to wider dissemination of the program are reduced.

Content was initially drafted in English and all materials were translated to Spanish. The design was developed in collaboration with Foster Family Agencies (FFAs) and other relevant organizations, which ensured stakeholder feedback was incorporated prior to the start of the project to ensure success.

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Each 90-minute session featured a guided dialogue/conversation, offering a space for connection, support, and learning from each other, followed by a more formal didactic opportunity where prospective and current resource parents learned concrete skills and approaches to care for LGBTQ youth. This content was informed by the following: (1) Dr. Ollen’s clinical expertise and experience working with parents of LGBTQ youth and resource parents/caregivers, (2), prior research funded by the Pritzker Center and conducted by Dr. Ollen on prospective resource parents’ willingness and hesitations to parent LGBTQ youth, (3) the extant academic literature, and (4) a pre-existing parent support curriculum developed by Dr. Ollen as part of her role as Clinical Director of the UCLA EMPWR Program.

Each of the 90-minute sessions included two parts: (1) a “dialogue,” where parents will be prompted to share and converse with one another to build a sense of community and peer support, and (2) a “didactic,” where parents/caregivers are provided some concrete, evidence-based strategies related to parenting and affirming LGBTQ youth. The dialogue included a set of pre-established discussion questions to initiate a conversation among parents/caregivers and will focus on different topics each week.

RECRUITMENT AND PARTICIPANTS

Partnerships were established with three community foster family organizations for recruitment of participants and support hosting the workshops - Aviva Family Services, Optimist, and Niños Latinos Unidos – Bellflower. It was notable that several more agencies expressed interest in partnering with the Reflective Dialogues project, however, due to limits on funding, it was only feasible to work with three organizations.

Parents/caregivers were recruited from LA County Foster Family Agencies (FFAs) and the Community College Foundation (CCF). A financial incentive of up to \$50 was advertised as compensation for completion of all aspects of the workshop (i.e., attending both 90-minute workshops, and completing a pre-survey and a post-survey), as well as a certificate providing credit hours for participation.

Participants in the workshops were limited to current and/or prospective resource parents/caregivers who (1) currently had a LGBTQ youth placed in their home OR (2) were approved and willing to consider a LGBTQ youth placed in their home. An emphasis was placed on recruitment of parents/caregivers who have questions or concerns about what it would mean to support LGBTQ youth. Interested participants completed a brief survey online through SurveyMonkey.com, where interested participants answered three yes/no eligibility questions (see Appendix A). Once participants completed the eligibility questions and provided their contact information, they received a welcome email with additional logistic details (see Appendix B).

Inclusion criteria for participants were the following:

- Current resource parents/caregivers
- OR prospective resource parents/caregivers
- AND openness to learning more about supporting and parenting LGBTQ youth
- AND ability to commit to the full program time (dates will be provided upon enrollment)

TIMELINE

In July and August 2024, the initial phases of the project were completed, including: creating the workshop curriculum, developing materials/manuals for facilitators and handouts for participants, devising a detailed recruitment plan in consultation with FFAs, and development of surveys for data collection.

Community partnerships were solicited and established during the months of August and September 2024, and recruitment was launched during this same time frame. This time was also used to identify the workshop facilitators. The four workshops were held during the months of October and November. The month of December was used to organize and analyze the

quantitative and qualitative data. The “train-the-trainer” workshop was held in January 2025 and the final report was also written during this month.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Both quantitative data were collected at two intervals (pre and post intervention) to measure the effectiveness of the intervention’s specific aims; qualitative data were collected at the end of the workshops. The quantitative and qualitative data collected fell into the category of “Quality assurance” data collection, and thus did not meet the standard of “research” required for IRB approval. Quality assurance data collection is designed to ensure the final outcomes of a project meet the expected requirements. Quantitative data were collected via Likert Scales, which were used to assess parents/caregivers’ self-rated willingness, confidence, and ability to support LGBTQ youth. Pre and post scores were compared to assess improvement/change across the intervention period (paired samples t-test, matched pairs design).

Open-ended (qualitative) feedback was collected to consider participant’s experiences of the intervention, any suggestions for improvement, and anything else they wished to share. The qualitative feedback was analyzed using Thematic Analysis. To understand how each session is received throughout the implementation phase, two additional brief open-ended questions will be asked at the end of each individual session: *“What was most helpful from today’s session? What would you have preferred to be different from tonight’s session?”*

For sessions that were held virtually, participants completed the pre- and post-surveys via an online platform. For sessions that were held in person, participants completed the pre- and post-surveys via pen and paper, which were collected, de-identified, and scored/analyzed.

RESULTS

Description of Participants: A total of 33 adults participated in the Reflective Dialogues workshops over the course of two months. Participants were a combination of prospective and current resource parents, as well as several staff members of each community partner organization. Participants ranged in age from 29 to 75 years old. The average age was 53. Workshops were held in either English or Spanish; there were 18 participants in the English workshops and 13 participants in the Spanish workshops.

Data Analysis (Quantitative): Likert scales were used to assess participant’s self-assessment of their confidence, willingness, and ability to foster LGBTQ youth (Likert scale of 0-5 where 0 = Not at all; 5 = Extremely). The quantitative data were examined in two ways: (1) collectively with all 33 participants and (2) by English vs. Spanish participants. Paired sample t-tests were used to determine whether the change in scores from pre to post workshop were statistically significant. Overall averages were also calculated, as well as the average change in scores from pre to post workshop.

All Participants: When examining the data collectively across all 33 participants in all four groups, the average score increased between the first and second workshop, indicating that participants on average experienced an increase in all

three areas – confidence, willingness, and ability. It is note-worthy that, on average, participants rated themselves highest on “willingness” prior to the workshops and lowest on “confidence.”

Although all gains were small from pre – post, the greatest gain was seen in “ability”, suggesting that the workshop was most effective in helping participants gain knowledge and skills to feel more competent to foster LGBTQ youth. The difference between the pre and post “confidence” and “ability” scores for all participants was statistically significant ($p = 0.02$; 0.043 , respectively). These results indicate that there was a meaningful change in participants’ self-reported confidence and ability to foster LGBTQ youth. The difference between the pre and post “willingness” scores for all participants was not statistically significant ($p = 0.094$). It is important to note that although this was not a statistically significant change, we did see a small increase in “willingness” when examining the average pre/post scores (+.18), indicating that on average, participants scores on “willingness” increased .18 of a point (on a scale of 0-5).

	PRE-Average	POST-Average	Pre/Post Change	P value	Statistically Significant? (<0.05)
Confidence	3.58	3.91	+0.33	0.002	Yes
Willingness	4.17	4.35	+0.18	0.094	No
Ability	3.79	4.17	+0.38	0.043	Yes

SPANISH vs. ENGLISH PARTICIPANTS. When examining the data across English and Spanish speaking participants, it is notable that the Spanish speaking participants rated themselves lower on all 3 ratings – “confidence,” “willingness,” and “ability” to foster LGBTQ youth, with average response of 3, 3.9, and 2.9, respectively. Both Spanish and English-speaking groups showed increases, on average, across pre – post scores on all 3 ratings, with the Spanish speaking participants making greater gains on all 3 self- ratings. For example, Spanish speaking participants increased their self-reported confidence by over 1 point (1.18), whereas English speaking participants increased their self-reported confidence by only .59 points. However, there was some notable variability in pre-post scores among Spanish speaking participants. These results suggest that Spanish speaking participants were more likely to start with lower self-rated confidence, willingness, and ability, they made greater gains over the course of the workshop.

	Average Confidence		Pre - Post Change	P-value		Average Willingness		Pre - Post Change	P-value		Average Ability		Pre - Post Change	P-value
	Pre	Post				Pre	Post				Pre	Post		
English	4.08	4.67	+0.59	.02		4.39	4.88	+0.49	.04		4.54	4.78	+0.24	0.10
Spanish	3.00	4.18	+1.18	.29		3.9	4.5	+0.6			2.9	4.5	+1.6	0.03

Data Analysis (Qualitative): Participants were given the opportunity to provide open-ended feedback at the end of each workshop. A simplified thematic analysis was employed to analyze these responses. Participants completed the feedback in their language of choice. Spanish responses were translated prior to analyzing.

Out of the 33 participants, 25 provided additional feedback. Of the 25 responses, 16 were explicitly positive, commenting directly on the facilitator and/or the content of the workshop being helpful. Of note, multiple participants comments on the

facilitator's lived experience and how this factor made the workshops more relatable. For example, a 32-year-old Aviva participant stated: *"Absolutely great and informative training. Loved how interactive and open it was. Very non-judgmental vibes."* Similarly, a 46-year-old Optimist participant reflected: *"Thank you for the workshop. It was very educational. It helped me understand how to be confident with LGBTQ youth."*

The remaining 9 responses were neutral comments. There were no explicitly negative comments about the workshop. Four participants explicitly requested more resources, trainings, and materials on LGBTQ and BIPOC topics. For example, a 55-year-old participant in the NLU workshop stated, *"Regarding gender equality, trust and support is the main thing."* Another 61-year-old NLU participant said, *"I am also a member of the community so I can relate to the struggles."*

Although not included in the official thematic qualitative analysis, the workshop facilitators shared reflections of their experience leading the workshops. Themes of respect, empathy, and unconditional support were noted throughout the interactive discussions with participants during the workshops. The qualitative data suggest that the workshop was overall very well received, with many participants finding the content and the delivery of the content to be helpful and feasible.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The workshops significantly increased participants' self-reported *confidence* and *ability* to foster LGBTQ youth, with statistically significant gains noted in both areas, highlighting the impact of empowerment through learning. This demonstrates the importance of structured, empathetic education to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to make a meaningful impact in their communities.

Spanish-speaking participants, though initially rating themselves lower in confidence, willingness, and ability, exhibited greater gains compared to English-speaking participants. This highlights the *transformative potential of culturally inclusive training* that addresses the unique starting points of diverse groups. This cross-cultural growth can be harnessed to continue to address challenges in concepts that are challenging to translate, in terms of language and culture.

Qualitative feedback revealed overwhelmingly positive responses indicating a strong and positive community impact. Of the 33 participants, 25 provided optional written feedback, with 16 out of those 25 participants explicitly praising the workshops, *citing the facilitator's lived experience as relatable and the sessions as "helpful" and "informative."* Additionally, themes of respect, empathy, and unconditional support emerged as central to participants' experiences, further emphasizing the workshops' success in fostering a supportive and empowering community.

Partnership with the community organizations was crucial for success of these workshops. It is imperative to partner with organizations who are able to fully commit to the work, to ensure it is successful (e.g., ensuring that the organization is in agreement of the importance and rationale of pre-post survey collection). Similar work in the future by other organizations

(such as DCFS) should prioritize establishing connections with community partners with organizational vision that aligns with the project. Furthermore, identifying specific personnel at the organization that can be a point of contact is important to ensure a strong dedication to following through on participant recruitment and engagement. Recruitment through a particular community organization partner is particularly helpful to engage the ideal participants – given that financial incentives are good but not enough to ensure pre and post data collection and overall participation.

The “train-the-trainer” workshop led to the conclusion that even though caregivers attended the prior workshops, many did not feel comfortable to be a *primary* facilitator without further support/training. Instead, most participants expressed confidence to participate as a guest-speaker or co-facilitator on a particular topic. Similarly, the staff members of the participating community organizations expressed feeling comfortable to apply the concepts from the workshops to other situations or scenarios in their work, indicating a positive trickle-down impact of the new knowledge.

Appendix A. Eligibility Questions

1. Are you currently an approved resource/foster parent/caregiver (including individuals and couples who either currently have a child placed in their home or those who are approved and waiting for placement)? Y/N
2. Are you currently a prospective resource/foster parent/caregiver (including individuals and couples who are either planning to start the approval process or in the process of getting approved, but not yet approved)? Y/N

Skip logic:

- If YES to either questions 1 or 2, prospective participants are asked questions 3 and 4 below.
- If NO to both questions 1 and 2, prospective participants are deemed ineligible and are provided with the following message: Thank you for your interest! At this time, we are only enrolling people as participants in the groups if they are a current or prospective resource/foster parent/caregiver.

3. Are you interested in learning more about supporting and parenting LGBTQ+ youth? Y/N
4. Are you able to commit to attend two 90-minute group sessions over the course of four weeks? Y/N

Skip logic

- If YES to both questions 3 and 4, prospective participants are considered eligible and will receive the following message: *Thank you for your interest! You are eligible to participate. Please enter your email below, and we will send you an email with additional directions.*
- If YES to both questions 3 and 4, participants are asked question 5 below.
- If NO to either question 3 or 4, prospective participants are considered ineligible and will receive the following message: *Thank you for your interest! At this time, we are only enrolling people as participants who are interested in learning more about supporting and parenting LGBTQ+ youth and able to commit to two 90-minute group sessions.*

5. Please enter your email address.

Appendix B. Enrollment Email Template

Hello and thank you for your interest in our parent/caregiver support groups for prospective and current resource/foster parents! In this group, you will have the opportunity to connect with other resource/foster parents, have honest and reflective conversations about challenges and concerns related to parenting LGBTQ+ youth in foster care, and learn about important tools and resources to help LGBTQ+ youth thrive.

To determine whether the program is helpful, you will complete a brief survey at the beginning and the end of the program. You will be paid \$15 for each survey that you complete (\$15 for the pre-survey and an extra \$15 for the post-survey). For participants that complete both surveys, and attend both sessions of the group, an additional \$20 will be provided, for a total of \$50.

Each group will meet two times for 90-minutes each, over the course of four weeks. We anticipate there will be 8-10 parents/caregivers in each cohort. After each group, you will receive a PDF with a summary of the content presented in the group.