

Introduction

On April 27, 2023, against a backdrop of anti-trans legislation being considered and adopted in several neighboring states, Governor Tim Walz signed legislation enshrining the state as a sanctuary for transgender youth seeking support their home states deny them. As the adolescents and their families move to Minnesota to escape toxic environments, it has become increasingly important to identify the services that Minnesotan organizations currently provide and what resources will be needed to increase capacity. This paper reports the results of interviews with eight Minnesotan organizations offering services to LGBTQIA+ individuals, with a focus on organizations that aid trans youth. The surveyed organizations include TIGERRS, QUEERSPACE collective, Queermunity, Rainbow Health, Family Tree Clinic, Transforming Families, Mossier, and Avenues for Youth. Publicly available information on each website was also examined.

The survey found a strong existing foundation with numerous successful programs past and present, a promising future community center through Queermunity, and increased communication between organizations. Yet, these organizations will not be able to fully meet the needs of incoming refugees. Staffing and funding levels will need to be increased for Minnesota to reach its full potential as a Sanctuary State.

Changing Legal Landscape

It has scarcely been eight years since the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage, but recent legislation has dramatically changed LGBTQIA+ rights for the worse, particularly for transgender youth. According to Amnesty International USA, “In the first four months of 2023, state legislatures introduced more than 470 anti-LGBTQI+ bills — most targeting transgender youth. That’s more bills attacking LGBTQI+ rights than in all of 2022. In 2023 alone, 560 anti-trans bills have been proposed, 85 have passed, 123 have failed and 352 are still active. Among the proposed bills, 45 are from Minnesota’s neighboring states, which together have passed almost twenty percent of all adopted bills. At the federal level 27 have been introduced that attack transgender rights, including one that the House of Representatives passed that requires schools to inform parents if their minor child attempts to change any gender markers, pronouns, or bathroom use. In addition to bills designed to “out” trans adolescents, many others focus on requiring athletes to play sports according to their biological sex or denying youth

access to gender affirming treatments. In response to this wave of legislation, Minnesota passed legislation preventing out-of-state extradition, arrest warrants, subpoenas, or removal of children from parents due to the child receiving gender affirming care.

Survey of Existing Providers and Services

The table on the following page summarizes the breadth of services currently provided by the surveyed Minnesota organizations. Save for a national Facebook group run by Transforming Families, these services are limited to Minnesota residents. The eight surveyed organizations were interviewed by Zoom, on the phone, and one through email during June 2023. Publicly available information on each website was also examined. The organizations examined were TIGERRS (T), QUEERSPACE collective (QSC), Queermunity (QM), Rainbow Health (RH), Family Tree Clinic (FTC), Transforming Families (TFF), Mossier (M), and Avenues for Youth (AfY). These organizations range in size from a single part-time staff member (TFF), to a smaller part of a larger organization (FTC), to larger groups like AfY and RH. One thing of note is that Mossier is a for-profit organization, as opposed to the others – one response to a lack of funding.

Table 1. Services available to Minnesota Trans Youth by Select Community-based Organizations

Services	Organizations							
	<i>RH</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>FTC</i>	<i>TFF</i>	<i>QM</i>	<i>QSC</i>	<i>AfY</i>	<i>M</i>
Parent/guardian support groups				X		X		
Mentorship to queer youth (1-1 and group)						X		
Youth social support groups		X				X		
Youth support groups				X		X		
Drop-in Clinic			X				X	
Counseling Services	X							
Legal services/advocacy	X		X			X		
Benefits Counseling	X							

Youth Driven Foster Homes							X	
Shelter (16-24 year olds)							X	
Educating	X			X				X
Training Health Care Providers		X						
Future Community Center					X			

RH - Rainbow Health; T - TIGERRS; FTC - Family Tree Clinic;
TFF - Transforming Families; QM - Queermunity; QSC - QUEERSPACE collective;
AfY - Avenues for Youth; M - Mossier

The services provided fall into several categories: Community building and social support, education, housing, and legal support and advocacy. In terms of social support, a quarter of the organizations interviewed provide parent/guardian support groups (TFF, QSC), one provides one-to-one and group mentorship to queer youth (QSC), two provide youth ‘social support groups’ for those up to the age of 19 (T, QSC), and two have support groups geared to trans and gender non-conforming youth (TFF, QSC). RH offers individual, group, family, and relationship therapy. FTC and AfY have partnered to provide LGBTQIA+ teens and young adults a drop-in program that builds community through group meals and events.

RH offers counseling services, including individual, group, family, and relationship therapy, geared towards LGBTQIA+ individuals both with and without HIV/AIDS, in recognition of the disproportionate impact of these diseases on the queer community.

Educational offerings range from increasing parent/guardian support (TFF, QSC), to LGBTQIA+ inclusive sex ed through the ‘KISS’ Program (FTC), to training organizations to be more LGBTQIA+ friendly (QSC, RH, M). In particular, M helps workplaces and supervisors to become more welcoming and inclusive. TIGERRS’ offers intersex care training for health care providers.

Numerous organizations have programs in place to deal with the unhoused: RH has a program that provides rental assistance for the first 2 years to individuals with HIV/AIDS, and AfY connects LGBTQIA+ youth, aged 16 to 24, to host homes through their program called ConnectQT.

Legal services include legal advocacy (RH, QSC, FTC) and benefits counseling (RH). Previously, FTC and RH have collaborated to provide name change clinics.

Existing Service Gaps

As always, however, there are needs for additional funds and resources. This section describes the unmet needs listed below in Table 2.

Table 2. Unmet Needs in Select Community- based Organizations

Unmet Needs	Organizations							
	<i>RH</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>FTC</i>	<i>TFF</i>	<i>QM</i>	<i>QSC</i>	<i>AfY</i>	<i>M</i>
Funding for Staff	X	X		X				X
Funding for Existing Programs	X	X						
Funding/Support to Expand Programming	X			X	X	X	X	X
Services for 18-24 year olds						X		

RH - Rainbow Health; *T* - TIGERRS; *FTC* - Family Tree Clinic;
TFF - Transforming Families; *QM* - Queermunity; *QS* - QUEERSPACE collective;
AfY - Avenues for Youth; *M* - Mossier

TIGERRS, RH, and TFF all expressed a need for greater funding in order to hire and pay staff. Rainbow Health is currently in the process of rebuilding their legal department with a focus on challenging insurers that deny coverage on the basis of gender identity, and lacks funding to pay for attorneys, researchers, and training. TFF is limited to one part time administrator and has only received one grant. In addition, although TIGERRS pays a small stipend to volunteers, there is a desire to provide part or full time jobs. Funding was withdrawn from a successful pilot program by AfY that donated funds for youth to spend however they chose (i.e., for rent, school, etc.) and the program was subsequently discontinued. Rainbow Health (and undoubtedly numerous other organizations) also have received a major cut to HIV/AIDS funding recently, despite demand for services.

Funding is also needed to expand resources. TFF, for example, wants to open new locations in Duluth, Moorhead, and Rochester. Locations such as these would also provide support access to families who reside in neighboring states but lack support. Rainbow Health and

QUEERSPACE collective both hope to expand services to meet the needs of those who wish to relocate to Minnesota.

A helpful expansion would be the creation of a gender affirming careline. Rainbow Health currently facilitates an HIV/AIDS careline and it has seen an increase in the number of inquiries about trans resources in Minnesota from callers who have fled or plan to flee their home states. Funding and the resources to create and man this hotline are badly needed.

An additional, notable, gap is the provision of services for those between the ages of 18 and 24, an age when youth's lives are changed as they reach adulthood. In a time when transphobia abounds, seeing successful LGBTQIA+ adults and receiving support is crucial to enabling queer youth to picture a positive future for themselves. Mentorship for this peer group would help incoming queer refugees establish and build relationships despite having been uprooted. It would also encourage career and academic growth and enable trans youth to become more financially stable.

Two met/soon-to-be-met needs are an LGBTQIA+ community center and a comprehensive list of Minnesotan resources. Queermunity is working to open a center in 2024 that will offer a lounge, meeting rooms, offices, and host special events and community programs. It will not offer any services but will direct individuals to where they can get resources. As for the latter, TIGERRS has such a list available on their website, which also includes queer friendly businesses and spaces all across Minnesota.

Future Needs

One speaker expressed concern over the coming wave of refugees and feels that their organization is not able to reach all of the LGBTQIA+ youth already in Minnesota, much less support an influx of refugees and their families.

A common consensus among organizations was uncertainty over what exactly incoming clients will need – three of the interviewed mentioned that their organizations had experienced a spike in parents and youth, who are planning on fleeing to Minnesota or have recently arrived, who were reaching out to seek information and assistance. With the trans refuge bill having only passed in March 2023, the true extent of help needed is yet to be known.

Conclusions

In spite of this uncertainty and lack of funding, however, there is growth and hope. QUEERSPACE collective, Family Tree Clinic, and Avenues for Youth all discussed their existing supportive services. Rainbow Health was pleased with the success of its housing services and ability to welcome people without judgment. Transforming Families was proud of the growth of parents in its programs, and TIGERRS had successfully continued its programs even during the height of the pandemic. Furthermore, in an area with some competition, there has been an increase in conversation and collaboration among these organizations. By cooperating with each other, and with better funding, organizations in Minnesota will be better equipped to handle whatever the future may bring – although more funding to facilitate it will be crucial.

Interviews Conducted

Organization	Address	Contact Information	Contact	Position	Date
<i>Avenues for Youth</i>	1708 Oak Park Ave N, Minneapolis, MN	612-522-1690 or info@avenuesforyouth.org	Ryan Berg	ConneQT Program Manager	6/7/23
<i>Family Tree Clinic</i>	1919 Nicollet Avenue, Minneapolis MN	612-473-0800	Jacki Trelawney	Director of Community Engagement	6/8/23
<i>Mossier</i>	165 Western Ave N STE 108, St. Paul, MN	651-341-0514 or info@mossier.com	Nick Alm	Founder	6/20/23
<i>Queermunity</i>			Hilary Otey	Co-Founder	6/9/23
<i>QUEERSPACE collective</i>		info@queerspacecollective.org	Nicki Hangsleben	Founder, Executive Director	6/8/23
<i>Rainbow Health</i>	2577 West Territorial Road, Saint Paul, MN	info@rainbowhealth.org	Erin Koelsch	Manager, Benefits Counseling Services	6/1/23
			Phil Duran	Senior Advocate, Aging & Gender Care Access	6/2/23
			Raquel Sidie-Wagner	Director of HIV Support Services	6/5/23
<i>TIGERRS</i>		admin@tigerr.s.org	Ty Gale	Core Crew Member	6/15/23
<i>Transforming Families</i>		info@tffmn.org	Hannah Edwards	Director	6/12/23