PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In March 2010, the DCTC Trans Coalition connected with other community organizations and community members and drafted a plan to conduct the first study of Washington, DC’s transgender, transsexual and gender non-conforming (hereafter: trans) population in over a decade. The primary goal of this Needs Assessment is to gain insights our communities’ access to trans-sensitive mental and physical health care, employment, housing, education, and immigration and documentation status. The project also explores interactions with police, prisons, and the criminal justice system and issues specific to certain trans communities, such as youth and seniors. Documenting this information shows us the greatest obstacles facing trans folks, allowing us to better advocate for all of the diverse trans communities in the District.

The four phases of the Needs Assessment consist of: 1) a series of community roundtables with a goal of reaching 100 community members; 2) the creation and distribution of paper and online surveys with a goal of reaching between 500 and 1,000 community members; 3) analysis of roundtable and survey results and distribution of findings; and 4) the creation of a community-government task force charged with ensuring the results are reflected in DC law, policy and community goals and projects.

OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY ROUND TABLES

We have now finished phase one of this project, which lasted between December 2010 and May 2011. During this time, we held seven community roundtables, reaching a total of 108 trans community members living and working in the District of Columbia. Six of these roundtables were held with community organizations with majority trans clients/members: Latin@s en Accion, The DC Trans Coalition (DCTC), Transgender Health Empowerment (THE), Helping Individual Prostitutes Survive (HIPS), the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL), and the DC Area Transmasculine Society (DCATS). One was held at a community member’s house. These roundtables were co-moderated by a member of the community group along with one of the organizers of the Needs Assessment project. Each roundtable lasted roughly 2-3 hours and participants received lunch, as well as a gift card to an area grocery store for their time. A list of institutional and individual donors is appended to this report.

The time during each roundtable was split up into three primary sections: map-making, discussion, and needs/survey questions. Participants drew maps of DC from their perspective as a ‘trans city,’ or a place where they see themselves as trans community members living and working. Making maps allowed for community members to consider how they fit in within the city, both physically and metaphorically.

Following the map-making exercise, we held a discussion about the maps and what community members drew. This discussion included issues community members felt were important to them, as well as where they felt their needs were not being adequately met.

Upon completion of this discussion, we created a list of questions or issues that participants would like to see included in a broader community survey addressing their needs. We have compiled all of these questions into a single document to be considered for inclusion in the survey to be distributed during phase two of the project.

In short, nearly all those participating in this project placed issues of safety and security as top concerns. This included physical safety and harassment (from the general population and from police), self-esteem and emotional safety, housing stability, joblessness, lack of employment
opportunities and job security, accurate personal documentation (including for those currently lacking immigration status), and a lack of secure access to medical/mental health resources.

**PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS**

The roundtables reached 108 participants – all members of DC’s trans communities. Reported ages ranged from 18 to 83, with a mean reported age in the mid-30s. As shown below, roughly 80% of participants were female identifying, MTF, or within the trans feminine spectrum. Further, roughly 80% identified as people of color.

**COMMON THEMES WITHIN THE MAPS**

The following themes occur repeatedly within maps created by roundtable participants at varied rates. The highest occurrence was the depiction and discussion of sex work strolls, which were featured in a little over half of all maps. These areas were described as spaces of work, community organization, police harassment and organizational outreach. The next most common theme was the inclusion of health clinics, direct service organizations and community organizations.

The remaining spaces of greater than 5% occurrence include: clubs and restaurants; parks and public places; participant’s home; friends’ homes; depictions of violence; work; online resources; and police, jail or the court house. Spaces shown in less than 5% of maps include gyms, schools, the Metro system, and places where drugs are used, obtained, or sold.
These are not the only images that appeared on the maps, just those that occurred in the greatest rates. Each map was decidedly unique and reflected the individual experience of each community member. Some maps included places where the participant or someone the participant knew had been a victim of violence, or knew violence occurs. Moreover, there were clear trends for particular community groups to depict some spaces more frequently than others. For example, nearly all African-American trans feminine persons mapped out the sex work strolls. This does not indicate that all of these community members were engaged in sex work, but rather that much of their community can be found in these areas. Similarly, all maps that included where one went to school (all universities) were drawn by white identifying trans persons.

SUGGESTED SURVEY QUESTIONS

Following the roundtable discussion about the maps, community members provided questions they would like to see included in the survey that will be distributed in phase two. We have broken down these questions along common themes, shown below. Participants’ suggested questions will inform the development of those that are ultimately utilized in phase two.

Categories of participants’ suggested questions:
- Employment;
- General discrimination;
- Identity documents;
- Methods of survival and resiliency
- Physical and mental health, including drug use;
- Police and prisons;
- Safety and violence;
- Trans-specific resources.

Example Suggested Questions

1) Do you have health insurance?
2) Have you ever been denied employment because you are trans?
3) Do you feel like sex work is your only employment option?
4) Do you feel safe on the bus/public transportation?
5) Where do you get materials for safer sex?
6) Have you had an STI/HIV test?
7) If you are not poz [HIV-positive], have you had trouble accessing programs for trans people?
8) Where do you go to find support and make friends?

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of the roundtables held during phase one of our Needs Assessment project show the stark reality of trans people’s lives in the District of Columbia: violence and abuse are widespread, fear is a regular part of trans community members’ lives, and discrimination and harassment are far from uncommon.

Such stunning results from the initial phase of this project bear witness to the need for a much broader, more in-depth survey of the experiences of trans community members who live and work in DC. With phase two of our Needs Assessment, we will be able to explore further the themes that recurred so frequently in the roundtable maps and discussions. We hope to reach a much
broader audience with phase two, distributing our survey to between 500 and 1,000 trans individuals. The results of that survey, which will be analyzed in phase three, will teach community members, activists, educators, and government officials what is needed to improve the lives of trans people in DC. Phase four, the implementation of needed changes, can then begin.

The critical need to improve trans people’s lives in DC cannot be understated. These findings provide us with a glimpse of the reality of trans oppression in DC, and the findings of the survey phase will provide greater depth to that image. As we continue to expand our network of support and embark upon the next phases of this Needs Assessment, it is important that activists, community leaders, and government officials start to take action to address the needs already identified.

THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS

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DC Area Transmasculine Society
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Latin@s en Accion
SMYAL
Transgender Health Empowerment, Inc.

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To learn more about participating in or donating to the DC Trans Needs Assessment, write to dctransneeds@gmail.com or call 202.681.DCTC (202.681.3282).