

CAMP

SHARON &

KAREN





introduction

Camp Sharon & Karen was an incredible opportunity for me to work with some parents with whom I shared a free exchange of ideas. We worked together to design a meaningful and approachable experience in support of a community of parents struggling to show up for their trans and gender nonconforming kids. Parents are faced with a daunting task when they learn their child's true gender identity, they are asked to let go of the kid they have been raising and join their kids along their journeys to find themselves. It is a painful act of independence for more parents. Many lose themselves in disbelief and blame themselves. That blame is, in reality, the expression of their disappointment in themselves for responding tactlessly to the news. Parents deserve space for their own reactions to this life-changing news. However, few parents are able to distinguish their own needs and experiences from distinction from what their kids are going and distracts them from showing up as the parents they want to be.

I chose to focus my thesis on the well-being of LGBTQ+ kids because I wanted to address a problem with which I had firsthand experience: vulnerably sharing the truth of personal identity with those you love most. It often happened during our co-design sessions that I could connect to the experiences these parents were going through with your kids understand their challenges firsthand. While I was lucky enough to receive a loving and thoughtful reaction from my parents, my mom's simple request a few hours later still haunts me to this day. After an entire conversation about overcoming my challenges, one of my parents quietly asked me if I was sure about what I had just told them. At that point in my life I was not yet able to explain with compassion why that question was so painful to hear in an otherwise joyous moment.

Throughout this experience, I was grateful to have the opportunity to share my experiences with my co-design team and in doing so, gave parents access to understanding the sought, some desperately. I had no intention of doing this or even a real understanding of this capability, but I was honored to be able to bring peace of mind to some.

Welcome to Camp Sharon & Karen, enjoy the journey!

Camp Sharon & Karen was designed and produced by Zach Narva as a master's thesis project in Design for Social Innovation at School of Visual Arts in New York City.

This project was advised by Jeff Fraklin.

Many thanks to PFLAG NYC and the TransFamilies Project, the JCC Manhattan, my parents, friends, and family who contributed to fundraising efforts, my amazing friends who contributed their time to participate in Camp Sharon & Karen, to my incredibly patient advisor, Jeff, and to Cheryl – thank you for creating this space for us to explore design in its most impactful format.



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FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Issues between parents and their transgender, gender nonconforming and non-binary kids stem from the fact that their core needs are in conflict.

trans kids

When a kid finally feels ready to come out to their parents, they expect and prepare themselves for the worst possible outcome. Trans and gender nonconforming (GNC) people, kids especially, struggle with disclosing their gender identity not only because they fear society's rejection but also because they are haunted with the thought of losing their parents' love forever. Kids who still live with their parents feel particular pressure to balance their need to live authentically with their desire to avoid the possible consequences that accompany telling their parents.

half of all teens get a negative response from their parents when they come out ¹

more than **1 in 4** are kicked out of their homes ¹

Before coming out, kids have to fight through the shame of potentially disappointing their parents. The catharsis of coming out can get over-shadowed by the harsh possibility of losing people they love who cannot, or will not, accept them for who they indeed are. Deciding to share this part of themselves proliferates inescapable shame. Wounded by their parents' response to their own disbelief and uncertainty—instead of expressions of love—these kids feel like they have lost support from their parents in a critical time of need.

Empowered by their preparedness to live openly and authentically, trans and GNC kids are not looking for any sort of permission when they come out to their parents. Personal values come into focus outweigh the need to accommodate others. These kids need their parents to get on board. For many, their parents are the only real source of support they have access to. Coming out marks the beginning of an entirely new chapter for trans and GNC kids; a chance to live authentically.

Young people feel that by rejecting their gay or transgender identity—a very core part of who they are as a person — their parents are rejecting all of who they are.²

1. Human Rights Campaign 2018 LGBTQ+ Youth Report

2. Family Acceptance Project. "Supportive Families, Healthy Children: Helping Families with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Children"

their parents

From the moment that parents learn they are pregnant, they begin envisioning their child's future. As their kids grow up, parents steer their kids towards these expectations, both consciously and unconsciously. Parents feel motivated to provide their kids with opportunities for success; when kids challenge those expectations, parents are forced to question their own understanding of who their kids are and how they could possibly stray from 'the plan.'

kids who receive a negative response from their parents after coming out are more likely to **experience depression, attempt suicide, use drugs and alcohol, and become infected with HIV or other sexually transmitted infections.**²

Parents are frequently baffled their kids come out—often this is merely due to the parent's unfamiliarity with the concept of gender identity. Their immediate response is most often focused on their own needs toward their personal experience; parents focus on what their child's identity means about themselves. Parents, almost universally, respond with disbelief; that reaction often pushes kids to interpret their parents' response as an act of rejection.

Parents think they are helping their children survive in a world they feel will never accept them by trying to prevent them from learning about or from being gay.²

2. Family Acceptance Project, "Supportive Families, Healthy Children: Helping Families with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Children"

coming out

The act of coming out has a high potential of creating a schism between parents and their kids, especially if having an LGBTQ+ kid challenges a parent's values. If a parent is too distracted by their own experience, the negative response communicates rejection to their kids. These expressions of disbelief, uncertainty or judgment can leave permanent scars on parents' relationships with their kids. Those who receive a negative response from their parents after coming out are more likely to experience depression, attempt suicide, use drugs and alcohol and become infected with sexually transmitted diseases.

40% of trans people attempt suicide in their lifetime.³

When kids come out, it marks their accomplishment of coming to terms with who they truly are. Sharing this part of themselves out is an act of true liberation and courage. Once they acknowledge their identity, there really is no going back; living an authentic life becomes their primary directive. It marks the end stage of a specific process of self-discovery and acceptance and the beginning of newfound self-actualization.

Many gay and transgender youth feel like they have to hide who they are to avoid being rejected, thrown out of their home, or hurting their parents and other family members... But hiding has a cost. It undermines a gay or transgender adolescent's self-esteem and sense of self-worth.²

3. THE TREVOR PROJECT: Facts About Suicide

problem definition

Parents are rarely in a position of knowledge or preparedness when their kid discloses, it comes with the expectation that parents will acknowledge them as their authentic self. Without warning or preparation, parents are asked to decide between their own expectations and what is actually happening. Defining this problem through the lense of parents' experiences allows for direct access to improving future health outcomes and well-being for trans youth through the creation of support systems at home.

parents and kids are at drastically different points of their adjustment processes after kids come out; kids have finally figured out and know who they are while their parents are left struggling to catch up.

Though parents may try to respond to this news with the best of intentions, the impact of parents expressing even unintentional disapproval—through incorrect pronouns, references a former name, expressions of judgment—has severe consequences on trans and GNC kids. Parents' initial response is what they most often end up regretting. Frequently, that misstep becomes a parent's most significant obstacle to repairing wounded relationships with their kids.

opportunity:

With a focus on preserving and healing relationships with their kids, parents can facilitate conversations to address the consequences of their negative reactions.



How might we create opportunities for parents of trans kids to examine their own experiences in order to overcome uncertainty and search for new ways to demonstrate support?

**“ I didn't not handle myself very well... there's a tremendous learning curve. I didn't say the things I should have said.

I didn't say 'I'm 100% behind you.' ”**

MEGAN

parent of a transgender son

BUILDING SUPPORT AT HOME

“ Parents think they are helping their children survive in a world they feel will never accept them by trying to prevent them from learning about or from being gay.

— FAMILY ACCEPTANCE PROJECT

project ALY

To begin my ethnographic research, I first reached out to an organization called Project ALY (Accept LGBTQ+ Youth) that provides workshop presentations to parents of, and teachers who work with LGBTQ+ youth. Project ALY was developed as an HIV initiative by a non-profit called CAMBA that connects people with opportunities to enhance their quality of life. Serving communities of color Flatbush, Brooklyn, Project ALY addresses family acceptance in settings where cultural and religious barriers, as well as negative associations with the LGBTQ+ community, make the emotionally taxing process of coming out all the more nerve-wracking for these kids.

Through Project ALY I was introduced to a woman named Keisha who shared her experiences of navigating family conflict after her daughter came out as bisexual. Her ex-husband, who moved to the US from Guyana and is a practicing Rastafarian responded to his daughter's disclosure by throwing some stuff in a suitcase, leaving it by the door, and telling her to get out of his house. Keisha countered her husband's threats by kicking him out and later divorcing him for the sake of her child's well-being.

Keisha explained that the best thing a parent can do for their LGBTQ+ child is to treat them exactly like they did before they found out.

“ You need to treat your child exactly like you did before you knew... they just want the same love and affection and respect you had for them before you knew they were LGBTQ+.

KEISHA

parent advocate from Project ALY

family acceptance

Project ALY's commitment to helping LGBTQ+ youth through supporting their parents is based on research produced by Caitlin Ryan and her Family Acceptance Project out of San Francisco State University. Through working with Project ALY and helping to facilitate their workshops, I gained some much-needed insight as to the challenges parents face once they learn their kid is trans or gender nonconforming.

Research outcomes generated by the Family Acceptance Project provided a pedagogical process which shaped my approach to addressing family acceptance. I utilized this learning to create the following the following map, which visualizes parents' barriers to acceptance after their kids come out.

Family background, including race, class, ethnicity, religion, national and regional origin play[s] a role in shaping how parents respond to LGBTQ identity.⁴

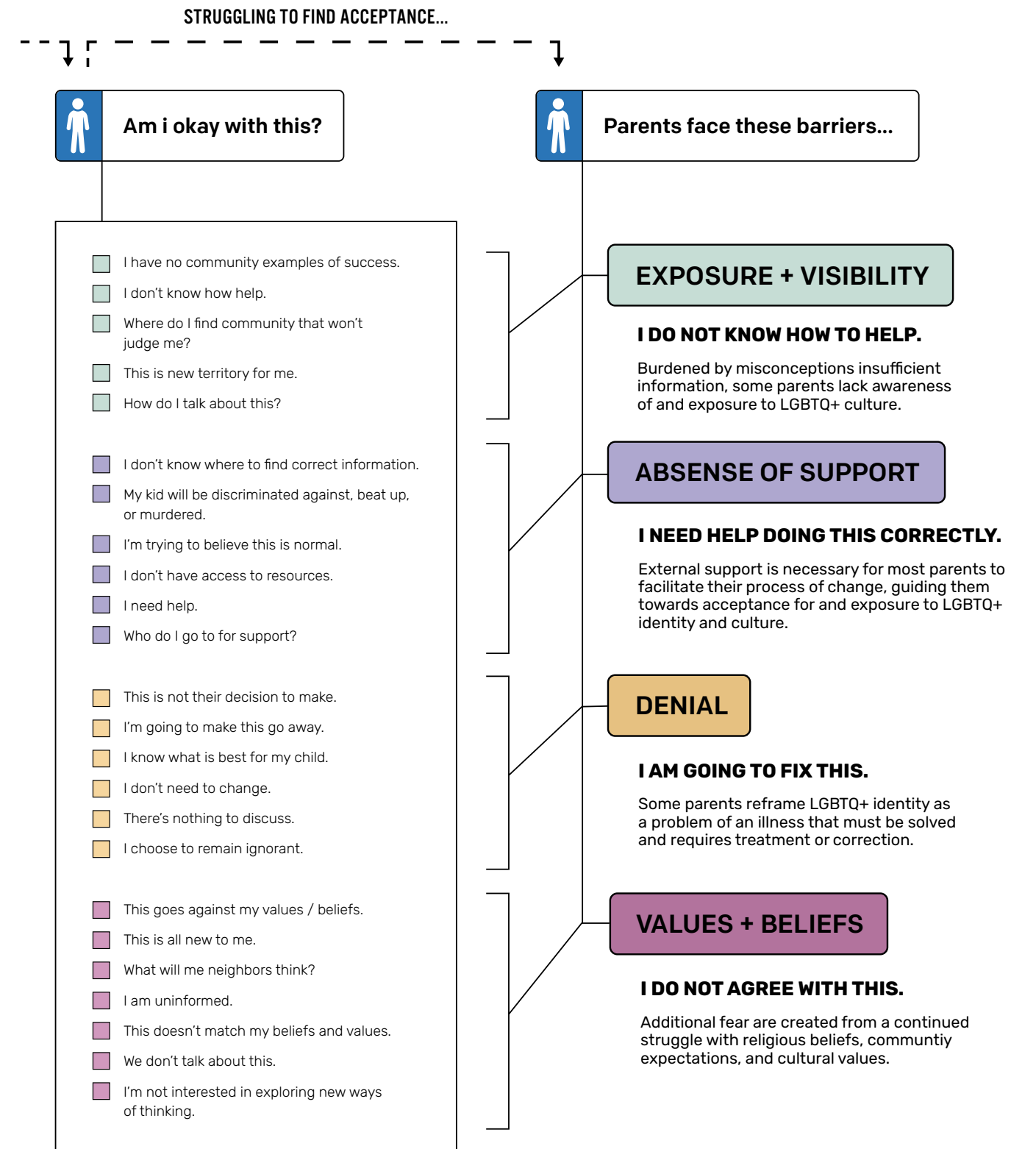
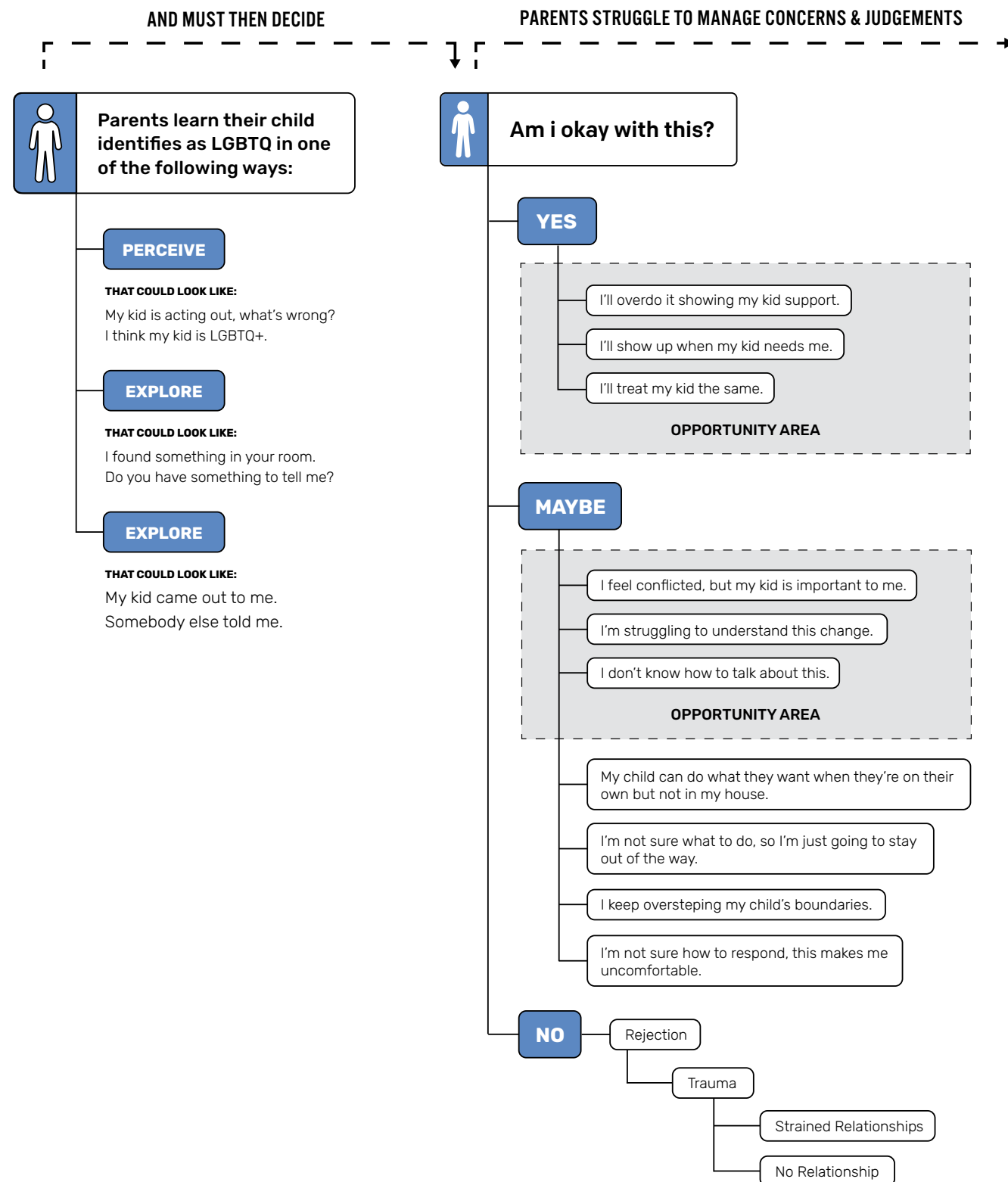
Intervening early, when concerns arise, enables families to change the life course for LGBT young people.⁵

4. Ryan, C. Generating a Revolution in Prevention, Wellness & Care for LGBT Children & Youth, 2014

5. Cornell University: What We Know Public Policy Research Portal

PARENTS' BARRIERS

ACCEPTANCE



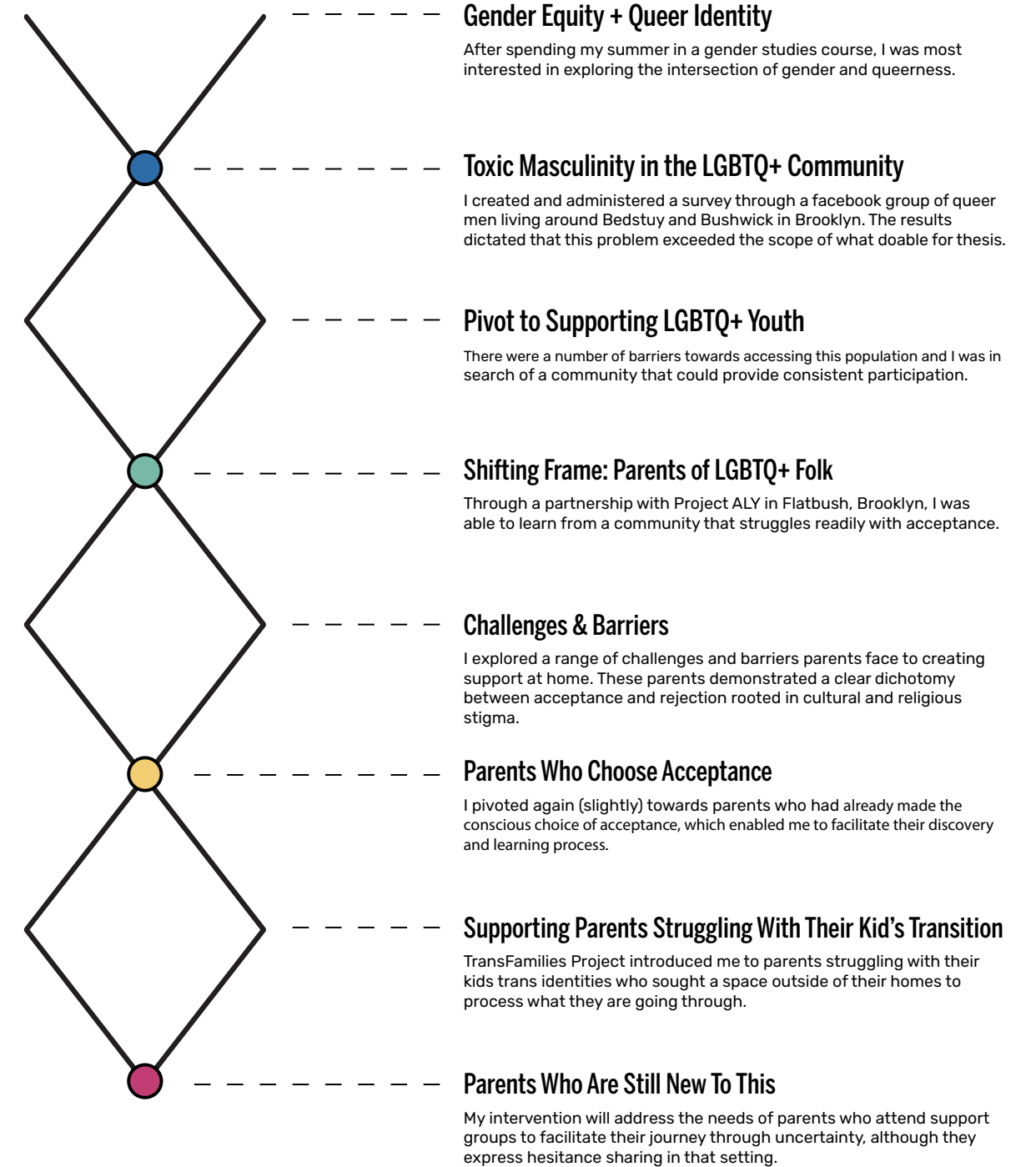
criteria

redefining the audience

Armed with this dichotomy of acceptance versus rejection, I struggled to determine the possibility of convincing parents, who have already decided otherwise, to accept their LGBTQ+ kids. Project ALY had offered me an excellent opportunity to explore the problem space. I also acknowledged that there was likely not much I could do to shift the thinking of a parent who had already rejected their kid. I also had no interest in showing up in a community as an outsider trying to give advice; that felt invasive. Instead, I pushed myself to consider where the most impact could be made. Moving forward, I took time to reassess my needs in search of a new community who would be readily prepared to work with me.

INTERVENTION CRITERIA	
are motivated to support their kids but struggle to understand what that looks like.	X
understand that their roles as parents is to love their kids no matter what.	X
have a hard time ignoring the impulse to put their own reaction before their kid's explicitly stated need.	X
seek out a space outside of their home to process their experience and build new systems of support.	X
express interest in learning new ways to demonstrate support and acceptance.	X

topic development



the transfamilies project

PFLAG NYC

Established in New York City in the early '70s, PFLAG is an organization with chapters all over the world, centered on offering support to parents, families, and friends of LGBTQ+ people. In Manhattan, PFLAG facilitates an independent program for parents and families of trans, gender-expansive and gender nonconforming individuals call the TransFamilies Project (TFP). Started by a parent named Judy Sennesh, TFP holds three independent meetings a month and also participate in general monthly PFLAG meetings.

Support Group Meetings

I was grateful to be welcomed into the support group meetings facilitated by the TransFamilies Project. It felt essential to state my intentions for being there and ask for the consent of the group at the start of the session. Thankfully, Judy began the meeting by asking me to introduce myself to the group and share why I had joined the group.

At the start of the meeting, we all sat in chairs in a big circle. We went around the circle and shared our names. Then, one at a time, each parent had 5-10 minutes to share their story and articulate what they were struggling with most on that day. The practice involves not offering feedback or even sympathy until after parents share their difficulties; occasionally, questions were asked.

I met parents in various stages of adjustment to their kid's identity. These support group meetings provided the perfect environment in which to learn about recurring problems for parents of trans and GNC kids. I had access to diverse perspectives on each of these challenges, as seen through the independent lenses of these parents.

“ How could our child tell us that their name, the one that their father and I worked so hard to choose...was just gone forever? The term ‘deadname’ is just so hurtful.

JUDITH

parent member of the transfamilies project

***DEADNAME (n.) –**

The name given to a transgender person at birth, which they often change when they transition. It should not be used to refer to them. Use the person's chosen name instead.

problem logic

After building a partnership with the TransFamilies Project, the pivot to working specifically with parents of trans kids meant I needed to refine the logic of how I needed to address this problem. Through the lens of parentings raising trans kids, I reframed the problem to clarify my approach for addressing the particular needs of both trans kids and their parents.

research demonstrates that...

PARENTS provide the greatest access to building and maintaining systems of support for trans and gender expansive kids.



after kids come out...

PARENTS are mired in disbelief and that confusion can lead them to make mistakes with long-term consequences for their trans and GNC kids.



as parents are left to negotiate their own uncertainty...

THEIR KIDS attempt to adjust to their newfound freedom and struggle to balance their own experience with their parents' discomfort.



kids are challenged by moments when...

PARENTS struggle to see that they **do not need to understand** what their kids are going through to order to show up and demonstrate support.

PARENTS find themselves in unfamiliar territory and are **left unprepared to respond thoughtfully**.

PARENTS can become too distracted by their good intentions and **must learn that their actions may have a negative impact on their kid**.



parents need to shift their behavior from being...

THE PROTECTIVE PARENT

focuses on preventing harm for their child, regardless of the consequences; their kids learn that **its not okay to be who they are**.

THE SUPPORTIVE PARENT

allows their child to take the lead and acts from a place of compassion, working with their children to learn how they want to be supported.

“ You’ve been heading in this direction for 18 years, we’ve only been here for days. At the end of this process, we’re coming out to support you as a family. We *will* f*ck up sometimes.

ROBERT

parent of a transmasculine person

PLAY, DISCOVERY, & COMMUNITY

“ [camp] is an environment designed to help kids learn, grow and experience things to better set them up for the future...

— DIRECTORS, HIDDEN VALLEY CAMP

early concepts

After defining my problem space, I began to consider what addressing this problem with parents could look like. Most of my ideas were framed as activities or programs with low barriers to facilitate a less onerous learning experience. With this framing in mind, I initially proposed these three directions for intervention:

Escape the Closet

An LGBTQ-themed escape room experience, challenging parents to navigate the complicated process of coming out. Parents find themselves in the bedroom of a kid in high school. The puzzles they solve lead them to learn that the kid whose bedroom they stand in identifies as LGBTQ+ and players must determine, as their final challenge, how to proceed now that they know the truth. The desired outcomes for this concept were teambuilding, collaboration and the ability to navigate hard conversations.

Fairy Godparents

A program where parents of LGBTQ+ youth are mentored by queer-identified people in their late 20's and early 30's. The mentor's role is to facilitate conversations and to teach contextual understanding and guidance about the challenges these kids face, in hopes of bridging the gap between youth and parents. The desired outcomes for this concept were knowledge about and social context for the LGBTQ+ experience and additional tools for navigating interactions with LGBTQ+ kids.

Camp Q.U.I.L.T.B.A.G.

An experience for parents of LGBTQ+ youth to build skills and new strategies to demonstrate love, support, and acceptance through a weekend at summer camp! The experience will also emphasize the value of building a peer support network of parents. Camp acts as a venue of support for parents who feel motivated to strengthen their relationships. The desired outcomes were building peer relationships between parents and learning to collaborate towards a shared goal.

Q.U.I.L.T.B.A.G. is an acronym, coined by the writer Sadie Lee, that stands for Queer/Questioning, Undecided, Intersex, Lesbian, Trans (Transgender/Transsexual), Bisexual, Asexual, Gay/Genderqueer.

so, why camp?

Camp presents an environment that provides an ideal opportunity to break parents out of the hesitation or anxiety they associate with support groups. Having gone to summer camp for nearly a decade, it is also an environment with which I am incredibly familiar and care for deeply. I wanted to create an experience to which parents could look forward; an antidote to any hesitation or lingering feelings of dread about the support group format.

In the playful, judgment-free setting of summer camp, parents can explore their own experience of their kid's transition in search of new ways to demonstrate support and acceptance. For parents of trans kids, the idea of exploring the challenges they face can feel burdensome. At summer camp, learning is framed through the lens of discovery and play. Many parents are left desperate for a community of people going through the same things, who can genuinely empathize with their challenges. Through the model of summer camp, parents get to learn through play and build precisely the sort of community they seek. While other parents use support groups to meet peers, parents who are already feeling uncomfortable are not predisposed to strike up a conversation on a topic they cannot face. The intensity of camp—the busyness, and excitement that surrounds new people and new places, spending a full day together—motivates friendships to form.

In my life, camp was a place to try new things without concern for getting things wrong; I got to explore who I am and learn about how I see the world. By framing my intervention around camp, I will be able to create a nurturing environment for parents to explore and learn through play, discover new ideas and offers the ideal environment to learn build a supportive community through the magic of camp.



PLAY



DISCOVERY



COMMUNITY

“74% of campers reported that they tried new activities at camp that they were afraid to do at first... [and] those activities often leave lasting impressions.”

HIDDEN VALLEY CAMP* WEBSITE

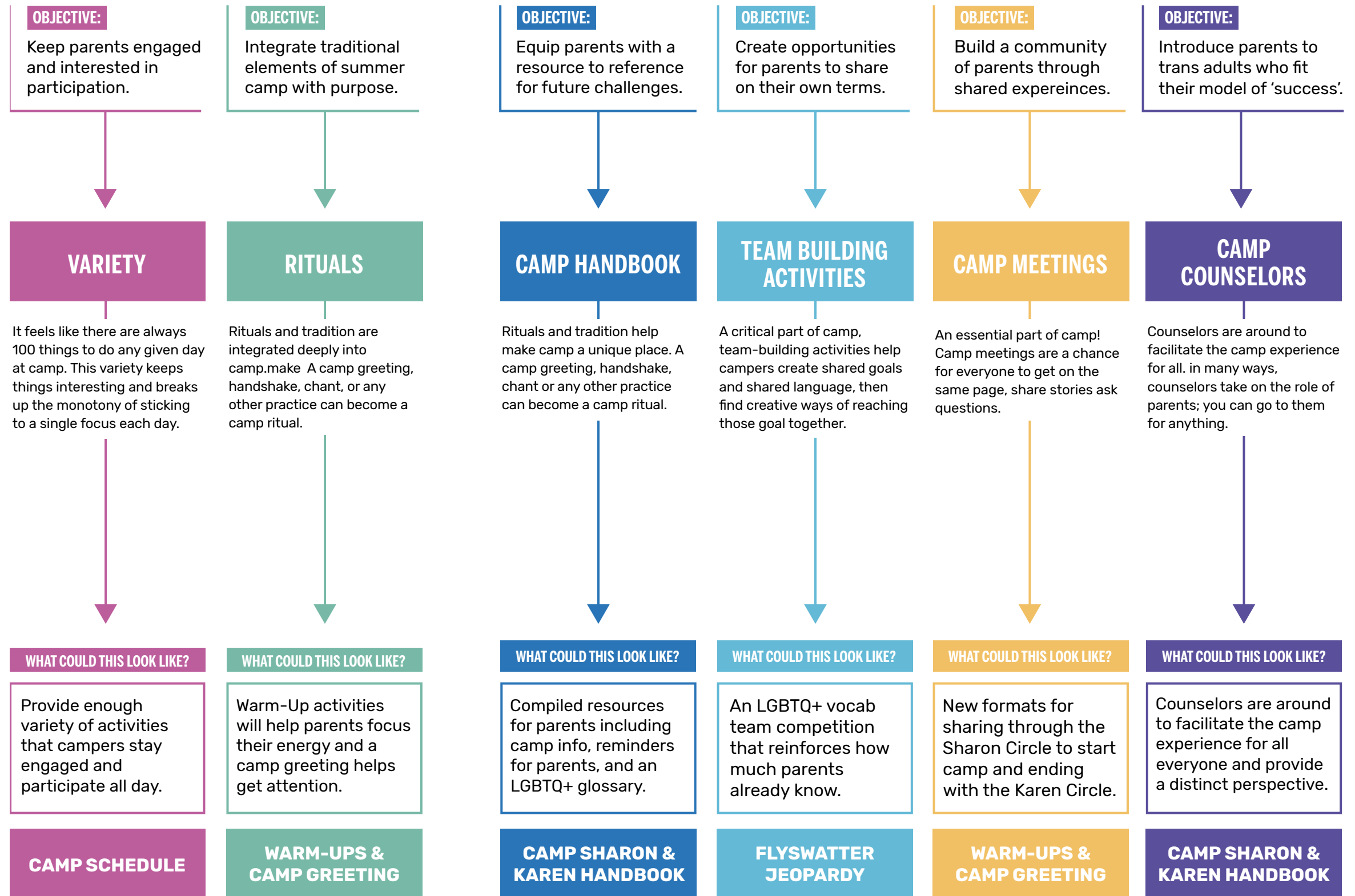
*My first summer camp alma mater!

elements of camp

The creation of a new summer camp concept depends on the ability to fuse elements of camp with this intervention's objectives. This graphic demonstrates how I plan to integrate key elements of camp into the camp environment.

Much of camp's uniqueness live in its ability to sustain uninhibited joy. The camp environment, in many ways, acts as an escape and infuses learning into almost every learning. The idea for camp came to me after recalling a commercial that I saw often during my childhood in New England. The final refrain of the add explains "because of camp, I turned out just fine." This statement might sound idealist, but I will argue that it also clearly articulates the beneficial outcomes of camp.

These particular outcomes, framed as objectives, each connect to a specific element of the camp experience in contribution to harness the magic of camp to facilitate learning and growth for parents of trans and gender nonconforming kids.



our co-design process



BUILDING A CO-DESIGN COHORT

After hearing them share their experiences and viewpoints at support group meetings, I knew that my project would require significant input from parents currently raising trans and gender nonconforming kids. Thankfully, I was able to recruit parents from TransFamilies Project (TFP) meetings who expressed interest in my project. With their expertise as our foundation and improving family dynamics as our north star, we collaborated together to design an intervention for parents who are new to TFP meetings and overall new to the experience of parenting a trans kid.

? How might we create an alternative setting for parents to explore their experiences that offers a lower barrier to participation?

WHO: The Co-Design Cohort

The parents who chose to participate mostly represented the portion of those in attendance who have regularly been going for years. These parents no longer feel as lost or uncertain as they once did and use TFP meetings as a tool to facilitate their progress. With their expertise as a guide, we chose to collaboratively design a space for parents who continue to struggle with uncertainty and demonstrate hesitance to share during group. The co-design team members were mostly parents who have moved beyond feeling lost or uncertain. Our process was made that much stronger by incorporating a parent who was brand new to parenting a gender nonconforming kid.

WHAT: Redefine Audience

Together, we decided find a way to address the needs of timid parents, newer to the group, who are still reeling from the news, and who do not feel comfortable sharing in the highly-vulnerable setting of a support group. I witnessed some of these parents at every group meeting I attended; some parents sit with worried looks on their faces, others disengage entirely from the conversation.

HOW: Our Practice

In the co-design process, I prioritized a team leadership model, aligning everyone around shared goal so that we each felt responsible for the outcomes of this process. The parents who participated were even more committed to contributing than I could have hoped for. Around our table, all ideas and contributions were up for consideration. My role in these co-design sessions was less like that of a formal leader and more like that of a facilitator.

CO-DESIGN GOALS

- **Affirm the opportunity area, narrowing the audience to parents newer to TFP meetings who express reticence to share during support groups**
- **Practice integrating the rituals of camp by beginning each meeting with introductions and fun warm-ups activities**
- **Test and refine camp activities that provide a balance between play, making, and reflection**

Discuss how to create an inviting space that encourages participation

“ I never expected to learn so much. I've been doing this for six and a half years now, I thought I pretty much knew it all.

DIANE, member of TFP & our co-design cohort

our co-design process

The parents who joined my co-design process gathered for 6 sessions to create and refine activities for camp. Together, we talked through shared challenges, parents' needs, ways to move through, especially when parenting a trans kid still feels unfamiliar.

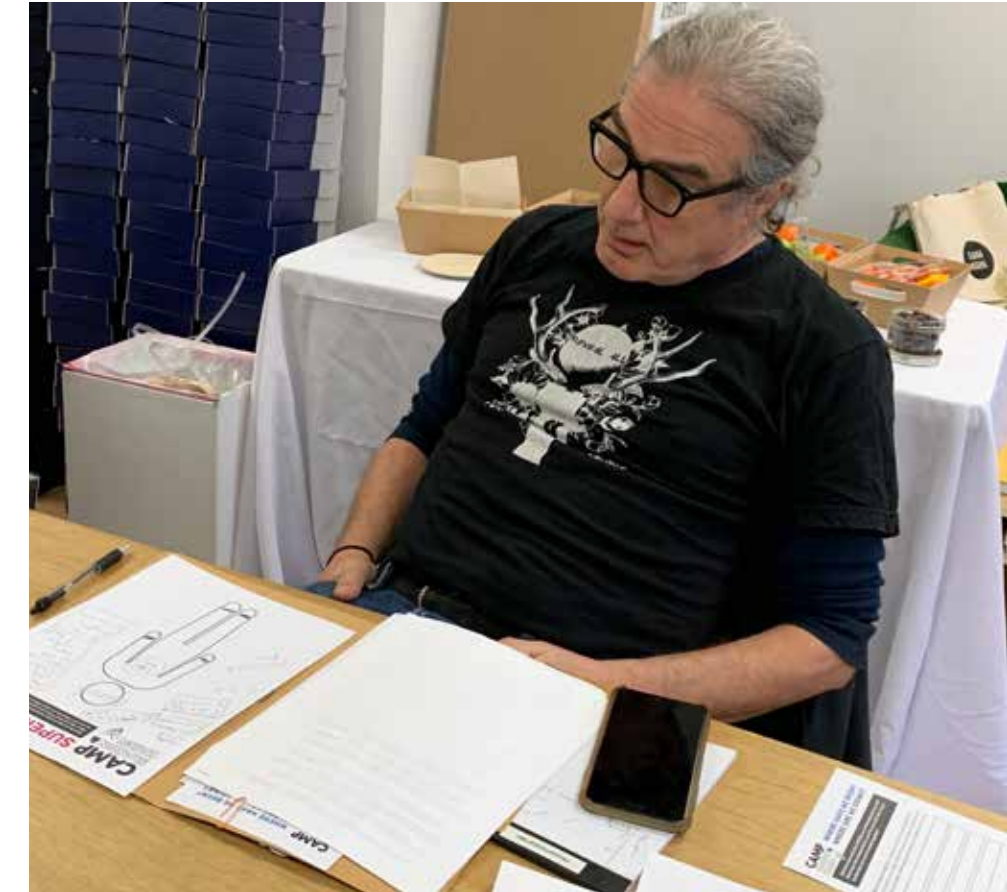
As a group, we designed several activities that explained in depth on the following pages. With the help of my co-design team, I was able to run all my ideas past parents and receive feedback to refine my ideas. My goal was to ensure all parts of the camp felt accessible and meaningful to an audience of parents with trans kids.

The ability to meet regularly with these parents and test activities, allowed me to walk into camp feeling confident and prepared. Parents also offered edits to refine activity instructions. In response to some feedback, I shifted the instructions, directing parents to capture their ideas before they began to draw. This revision removed some of the pressure from campers, making the activity less demanding and more fun.

The participation of parents was a crucial element of my process. It truly illustrated, firsthand, the power and value of social design. It also gave me the chance to utilize new leadership capabilities. Without the contributions of these parents, the final intervention would have stalled out.



TFP parent Julie shared her experiences working as an occupational therapist and the interesting connection she has witnessed through her work between LGBTQ+ identity and a variety of processing disorders.



TFP parent Robert shared very openly about what he saw as his weaknesses, in addition to his strengths.

Notes graciously captured by Grace Kwon.



prototype: draw yourself as a superhero



This activity was design as a way to help parents think about how they see themselves and how they believe others see them. It also offers the chance to consider personal strengths and how they can lean on those strengths under challenging moments with their kids.

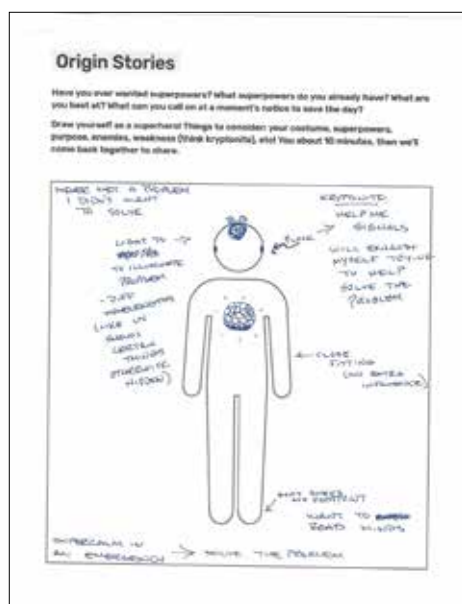
the top of the page got became more explicit, and the final version included new dedicated spaces on the worksheet with questions to prompt thematic, critical thinking. This new structure enabled parents to approach at their own pace and participate fully in the activity.

The original version of this activity was introduced with a narrative about superheroes and discovering superpowers. This story confused a number of the parents—there was no apparent connection between this activity and the objectives of sending parents to camp.

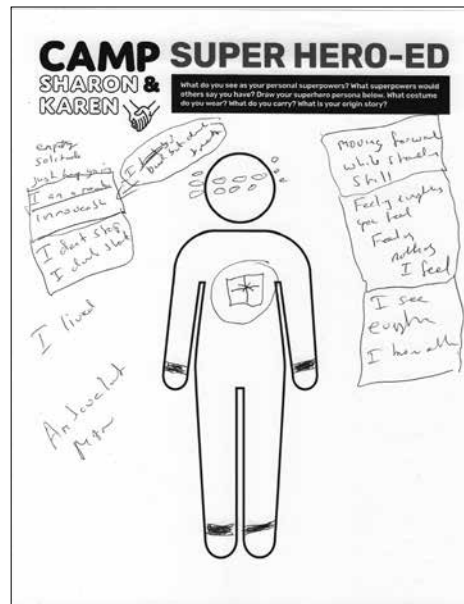
The activity mostly received positive feedback from parents, although a few expressed hesitation due to pressure they felt to 'draw well.' In response to their input, the instructions were updated to include this reminder: "the goal of this activity is not to draw well, just a new way to express yourself." In later iterations, the instructions at

“ I found the superhero part...confusing, but it was fun to think about what my superpowers would be!

MEGAN, parent member of TFP & our co-design cohort



version 1



version 2



version 3



TFP parents Megan and Ronni discuss the struggles they each had with feeling like they cannot get anything right with their kids.

prototype: handbooks

One unplanned outcome of our co-design sessions was the opportunity they offered to gather the most important lessons and perspectives for parents of trans and GNC kids. As we compiled this list, ideas started to arise about the best way to share these lessons with campers.

One parent offered the idea of creating something physical, for campers to have access to for reference in the future. From that idea, we decided parents would receive a handmade camper handbook to take home with them.

As this list came together, I brought it to the co-design team to adjust the wording and finalize the list. We were able to collect a large list major lessons a parent of trans or GNC kids can work towards as they adjust to their new reality.

As the handbook concept grew, I built this list of reminders into a handbook for campers. It leaves them with a resource to utilize in times of uncertainty, or to prepare, thoughtfully, for hard conversations with their kids

As this list came together, I brought it to the co-design team to adjust the wording and reach agreement on a list that constitutes all major lessons that a parent of trans or GNC kids needs to work towards as they adjust to their new reality.

As the handbook concept grew, I built this list of reminders into a handbook for campers. It leaves them with a resource to utilize in times of uncertainty and to prepare, thoughtfully, for hard conversations with their kids.

Take your child's lead, even if it makes you uncomfortable.

Acknowledge that you have work to do on your own.

Thank your child for being open with you and thank yourself for creating an environment that allowed this to happen.

Lean on a familiar nickname as you adjust to calling your kid by their chosen name.

Make healthcare decisions based on your kid's needs, not your own.

Nurture your children's relationships with trans peers.

Remember that your child's gender does not define them (but deserves affirmation).

Find a different way to say 'this doesn't change how I see you.'

Be honest with yourself about your feelings and where they come from.

Seek out positive trans mentors and strong trans role models for yourself and your child.

Access your own support system.

partially adapted from a piece on MyKidsGay.com's titled,

"8 Ways To React When Your Child Comes Out as Trans"

With the help of DSI cohort member Danielle Skinn, we assembled these handbooks by hand. After the page and covers were cut to size, we sewed the books together and finished them with some book cloth in our brand colors.



prototype: journey mapping

This activity began as an idea offered by Kirsten, one of the members of the co-design team. In her initial introduction, Kirsten included several concepts and analogies that build out a very comprehensive activity.

The objective of this activity is for parents to create some sort of visualization or map connecting 3 or 4 awkward moments between a parent and their trans or GNC kid, including the experiences of both parties. During testing, so many parents drew representations of how they were feeling at specific moments on their paths that we decided to create stickers for campers to use during this activity. The

stickers each offered a different emotion or a symbol to mark challenges, wrong turns, and hazards reached along the way. To end the path, parents were asked to consider new 'destinations' going forward.

From version one to version two, we added a worksheet that helped parents begin the activity with reflection. We then prompted parents with questions to consider how to visualize their paths through challenges and new experiences.



These prototypes of our sticker set received excellent feedback. This test only had stickers for emotions and means transportation, together we brainstormed some other concepts that needed stickers: road blocks, detours, wrong turns and traffic.



WELCOME TO
CAMP
SHARON &
KAREN 



We are so glad to have you at camp! Today is going to be a big day and we are so proud of you for making the choice to come to camp and work through your own uncertainties around your kid's transition.

We understand how challenging it can feel when you're asked to abandon your expectations, it's okay to need time and space to yourself to reach internal resolution. By participating in camp, you are taking a great step forward toward a better understanding of your own challenges. This work prepares you to make progress in search of a stronger relationship with your kid. Welcome to Camp Sharon & Karen.

We're so glad to have you at camp,



Zach Narva,
DIRECTOR, CAMP SHARON & KAREN

CAMP SHARON & KAREN **CAMP SCHEDULE**

10:00 AM	Welcome & Warm Up
10:45 AM	Sharon Circle a space to share stories and get to know each other
11:15 AM	BREAK
11:30 AM	Superhero-ed a chance to recognize and acknowledge personal strengths and capability
12:00 PM	Arts & Crafts
12:30 PM	LUNCH
1:15 PM	Vocab Challenge a game to test your familiarity with LGBTQ+ terms and concepts
1:30 PM	Leading Hard Conversations practicing how to facilitate difficult conversations and navigate moments of tension
2:15 PM	Ask the Pros a chat with your trans and non-binary counselors
2:45 PM	Where are we going? Where have we been? visualizing our journeys so far, looking forward to a future destination
3:15 PM	BREAK
3:30 PM	Closing Karen Circle a chance to reflect and appreciate each other at the end of our day together
4:00 PM	Camp Ends!

team sharon & karen



When my friends Sam and Bex agreed to be our camp counselors, I felt especially grateful. During our co-design sessions, parents shared that in times of uncertainty, they needed reassurance that their kid had a good chance of growing up and being socially successful, getting a good job and finding someone who loves them.

The best way I could think of to model these possibilities at camp was to ask two trans-identified friends to be our camp counselors. During the afternoon, camp provided campers an opportunity to speak directly and openly with their trans-identified conversation and ask whatever questions they had in a safe space where mistakes were allowed.

My closest friend Sami came to camp to help us with arts and crafts and share her expertise facilitating caring and supportive spaces for kids.

“ I appreciate Sam for sharing their experiences of surgery and how happy they are as a result of that procedure.

SHIRLEY, Camp Sharon & Karen camper



Our photographer Lu was able to capture every important moment of our time at camp. She is responsible for the majority of the images in this process book.

sharon circle

The Sharon circle was our opening activity at Camp Sharon & Karen—we began with introductions, a name game and we made a group agreement. After a few warm-up games to focus the group's energy, we moved into the Sharon Circle. First, parents were asked to share the most interesting thing they have learned through the process of their kid's transition. Then they were prompted to share the thing that has made them laugh the most. The final prompt asked parents to share the stupidest mistake they had made so far. These particular mistakes came up again later in the day during our nonviolent communication activity.

The Sharon Circle was a great example of creating a low barrier to entry. The prompts did not ask very much, but left the door open for whatever a parent felt like sharing. The questions were framed to allow parents to open up and share vulnerably or simply give a matter-of-fact answer. Given the order of questions, responses became more open and vulnerable as the activity continued on.

The Sharon Circle was a brave space where everyone shared openly; many had the self-awareness to name discomfort as they noticed it. As we made our way around the circle, the parents were all very affirming and supportive of each other.

The Sharon Circle was a brave space where everyone shared openly; many had the self-consciousness to name discomfort as they noticed it. As we made our way around the circle, the parents were all very affirming and supportive of each other. Campers participated full and permitted themselves to answer prompts that increased in sensitivity as they progressed.



(clockwise from top left)

Kathy and her husband John telling the story of their son's recent name change.

(she's sharing, he's caring)

Kirsten gives some personal advice to the other campers.

Liz shares important lessons she has learned from raising her trans son in the Sharon Circle.

Zach shares some research about outcomes for trans youth.



camp sharon & karen handbooks

As we compiled the list of lessons and reminders during the co-design process, a few of the cohort parents also mentioned the benefit of having a glossary of currently-used LGBTQ+ terms. I thought to add a notebook section so that a camper's entire day at Camp Sharon & Karen would be captured in one place. The ultimate goal was to create a reference for parents to utilize in future moments of tension or conflict with their kids.



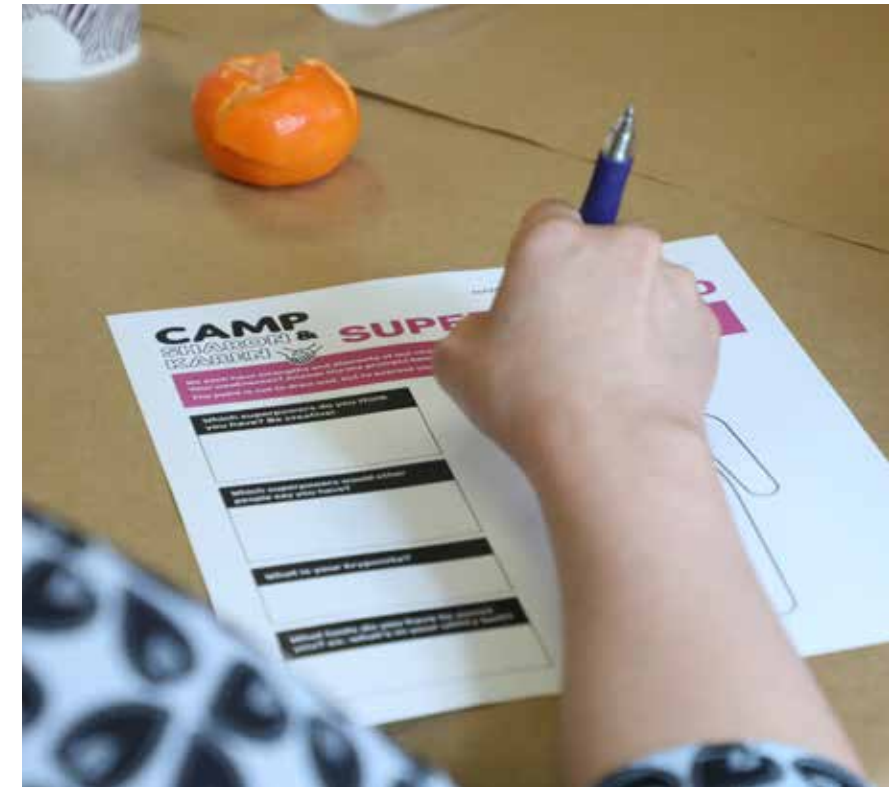


superhero-ed

Following the Sharon Circle, we took parents through an activity to assist help them transition out of a vulnerable space and onto our next activity. The objective of this activity was to motivate campers to acknowledge their strengths, immediately following the vulnerability of the Sharon Circle, and to offer them a way to reflect.

This final format asked parents to name their 'real life superpower' and powers which others might say they have. We revised this worksheet to include a written section on the worksheet to spark creative thinking, facilitate brainstorming and help them plan their drawings. The instructions on the page mirror the prompts campers receive as they begin the activity.

Once everyone was ready, we came back to share our results. back around the circle. We designed an activity to pull parents out of feeling vulnerable by using imagination—a powerful and underutilized tool.

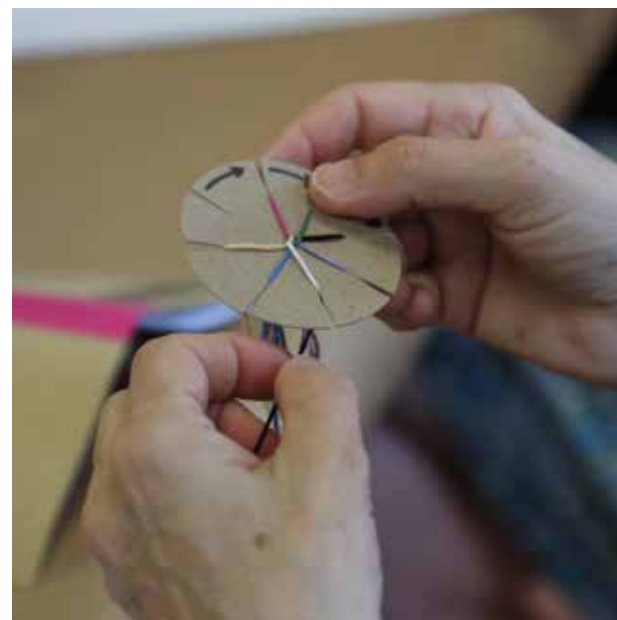


Parents responded very enthusiastically to the crayons and spent a few minutes trading colors and finding the ones they needed for this drawing activity.

arts & crafts

It felt essential to include arts and crafts as an activity at camp. Some of my fondest camp memories involved working on arts and crafts projects. As we tested during our co-design process, friendship bracelets proved to be our best option—we added a simple cardboard loom to simplify making them.

This activity allowed parents to keep their hands busy to expel nervous energy and help them stay present and engaged. The bracelets themselves act as a symbol of the commitment they came to camp to make. Parents shared that this was by far their favorite activity at camp. Many parents made two bracelets—one for themselves and one for their kid—before they left.



In addition to the friendship bracelets, camp also provided materials for parents to create collages using magazine and colorful paper.



Liz works on her second friendship bracelet. Campers were thrilled by the opportunity to do some crafts, keep their hands busy and make space for emergency conversation.



flyswatter jeopardy

Using the glossary of terms available in the handbook, we developed an activity to demonstrate to parents how much information they already know. Borrowed from youth engagement activities, flyswatter jeopardy is played by covering a board with terms. As the activity leaders read off definitions, two teams, each armed with a flyswatter, race to be the first to slap the term for that matches each definition—similar to the structure of jeopardy. The team who reaches the answer first earns a point. This game offered an excellent chance for some low-stakes competition between campers and also provided an excellent way to build up energy again after we took a break for lunch.

This activity received the most boisterous response, and collaborative dynamics emerged among the teams, who worked together to make sure their team got the point. (we weren't keep score.)



One team struggled to get their bearing as the competition ramped up. Shortly after this moment, everyone let loose and got into that activity; at this point, no one held back.



John got a little overexcited during his turn and completely forgot to grab the flyswatter from his teammates!



leading hard conversations

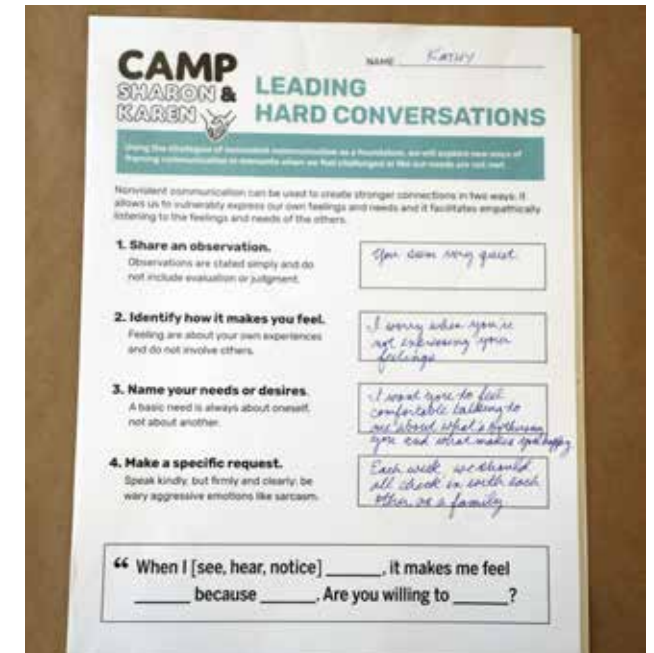
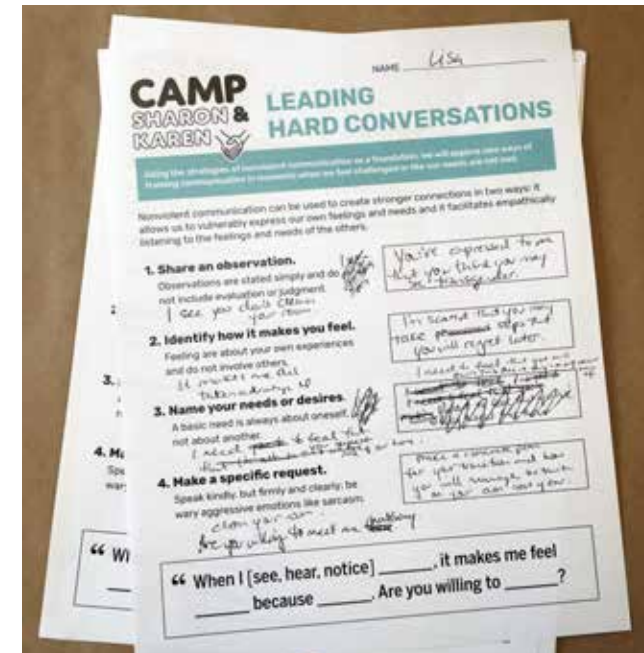
This activity offer parents new capability to frame conflict and speak with greater intention. We introduced this format to parents as a tool to utilize during hard conversations. Nonviolent communication (NVC) practice avoids using language that evaluates the behavior of others, which can trigger defensiveness instead of understanding.

NVC emphasizes that each of us can only truly speak to our own experinces. Framing hard conversations through this lense alleviates the pressure kids feel because parents statments are stripped of "jugement criticism, labeling and pigeo- holing others, avoiding responsibility and blaming." ⁶



“ Nonviolent Communication shows us a way of being very honest, without any criticism, insults, or put-downs, and without any intellectual diagnosis implying wrongness.

– Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D.



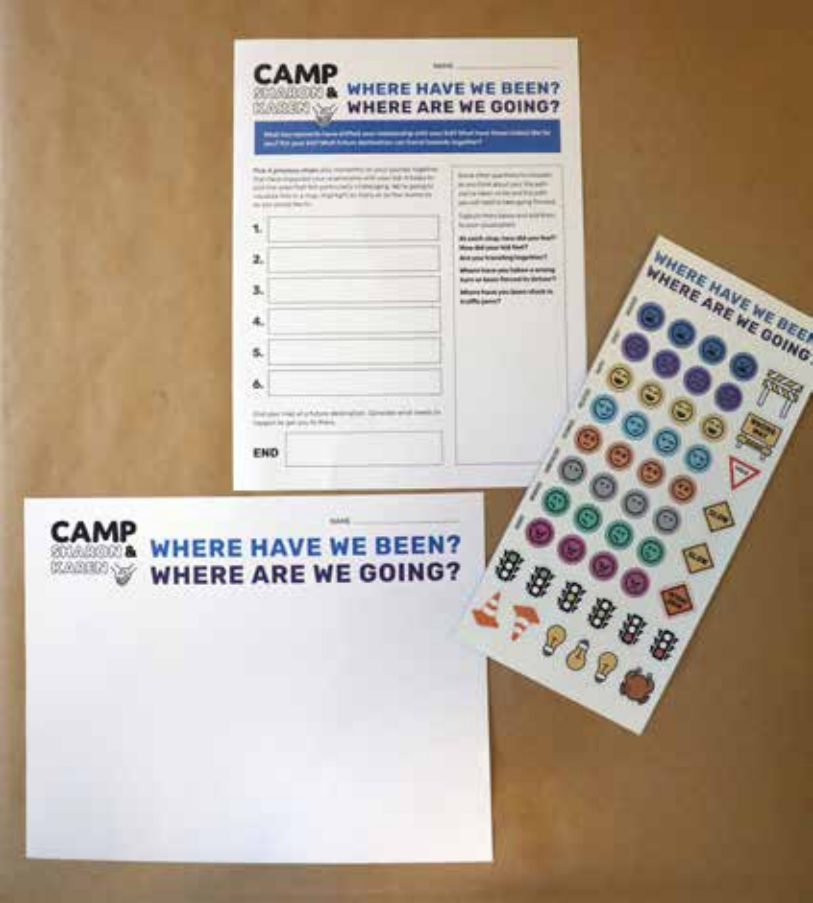
The worksheet walked parents through the structure of nonviolent communication with prompts and descriptions for each step of the process.

6. "What is Nonviolent Communication?", www.nonviolentcommunication.com

where are we going? where have we been?

This activity rounded out our day at camp and was the first one we developed during our co-design sessions; the idea, almost in its entirety, came from one parent who was eager to explore mapping their experiences. We designed this activity to offer parents a chance to reflect on their experiences thus far, with particular attention to how their own experiences differ from those of their kids. As we worked through different prototypes of this activity, our efforts diverged. Most parents wanted this activity to have less structure, so we moved from calling it a map to 'a chance to visualize your journey' – other elements carried this journey analogy throughout the project.

While the narrative that introduced the activity became broader, we maintained journey metaphor and produced a sheet of stickers to help parents visualize their emotional responses. We also provided labels to mark detours, wrong turns, traffic jams on parents' journey towards reconciliation with their kids. To conceptualize a path through challenges they have not yet reached, parents were asked to include a 'future destination' on their map and consider how they might get there.



Final worksheets and custom sticker sheets produced for Where Have We Been? Where Are We Going?



These completed worksheets are a great representation of how different parents were able to interpret and follow the instructions in their own way.

Shirley shares her final map and the major communication challenges between her and her transmasculine kid, Mel, with the group.



OUTCOMES & EVALUATION

evaluation

The majority of my evaluation indicators for this project were qualitative in nature. While there were some quantitative indicators as well, this intervention was positioned to create and measure a shift in perspective, behavior, and expectations, which were mostly available through observation and self-reporting. I can say with certainty that I was able to observe and document changes in mood, hesitation to share, and expressions of comfort discussing transgender identity and related topics.

There were numerous chances to collect responses from parents about their current state, including goals, challenges, and expectations. Pre-camp online surveys collected initial data before campers arrived. The opening Sharon Circle and closing Karen Circle provided significant opportunities to gather insights at the very beginning and end of camp, to measure observed change over the course of the experience. Closing surveys also gave parents the chance to articulate their own experiences of change. Through this project, I learned the importance of having a monitoring and evaluation plan; although I was able to collect data throughout my process, clearly and more consistent questioning would have provided more explicit insights.

Overall, intentional shifts in behavior towards engaging with trans and gender nonconforming kids, in thoughtful and collaborative ways, signal increased self-consciousness in campers who attended Camp Sharon & Karen.

85%

OF PARENTS WHO CAME TO CAMP SHARED THAT THEY FELT 'EXTREMELY WILLING' TO SHIFT THEIR BEHAVIOR BEFORE THEY GOT TO CAMP.

100%

OF CAMPERS WERE FIRST INTRODUCED TO AND PRACTICED NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION AT CAMP, PREPARING THEM TO USE THIS TECHNIQUE IN FUTURE MOMENTS OF CONFLICT.

HALF

OF OUR CAMPERS BEGAN CORRECTING THEMSELVES DURING CAMP WHEN THEY USING THE INCORRECT PRONOUNS FOR THEIR KID.

outcomes

“ My son told me he was transgender 9 months ago...I couldn't believe it...I've been trying to ignore it ever since.

BEFORE CAMP



AFTER CAMP

“ Watching parents figure out their next steps and come to terms with their uncertainty was, honestly, **inspiring**. I appreciate that we didn't do the **fake vulnerability** thing.

“ It's hard to get my kid to express their thoughts about themselves...especially about their transition.

BEFORE CAMP



AFTER CAMP

“ Camp was a **fantastic experience**...[it] was informative, constructive, and also—crucially—**very positive** about the queer community and the trans experience, in particular.

“ When our kid came out, we made 10 calls immediately. We're both doctors so we try our best be effectual.

BEFORE CAMP



AFTER CAMP

“ Communicating gender identity as an ally **is a gift**. Now I understand why he asked for our support creating space for him to feel safe coming out to everybody.

“ I was so shocked and confused, I never knew the term 'transgender' until my [kid] came out to me.

BEFORE CAMP



AFTER CAMP

“ I hope to continue to embrace [my son] for who he is so happy to be...today's experience has shifted how I can **thoughtfully approach** hard conversations.

future iterations

Camp Sharon & Karen would be grateful to continue past this academic thesis process. In the future, a multi-day version of camp would provide the opportunity to explore a bit more deeply and build a stronger community. With a longer format, an opportunity arises to have parents come to camp for a few sessions before their kids join them later in the week. In the setting of camp, parents and kids can work on collaborative team building together.

I have already started reaching out to some LGBTQ+ aligned organizations in the Boston area and plan to reach out to some other companies and organizations that have access to venues that could host camp. The materials for camp are already complete, with funding and a venue, Camp Sharon & Karen can live on and adapt to meet the needs of particular audiences.

I have received suggestions that Camp Sharon & Karen could develop into or produce a curriculum which would make it much easier to scale and implement clearly in other settings, by different facilitators. The Sharon & Karen curriculum could incorporate into school curricula and other spaces that have ready access schools and areas that have available access to parents in search of information and capacity building. These same activities can be used to train those who work with trans, GNC and gender-expansive kids to be sure they're supporting and nurturing kids to the best of their ability.

“ When is the next session of camp?
I'd love to come and bring my kid!

– SHIRLEY, CAMP SHARON & KAREN CAMPER

