

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCLUSION

What We Heard from LGBTQIA+ Youth and Allies in Napa County

“I feel welcome when I can share myself fully, be vulnerable. That is real safety.”

*High School Student, Napa County*



**NAPA COUNTY**  
Health & Human  
Services Agency

Live  
Healthy  
Napa  
County



Vive  
Saludable  
Condado  
de Napa



**LGBTQ**  
CONNECTION

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## Project Background

Live Healthy Napa County (LHNC), a Napa County Health and Human Services Agency program, is a community health collaborative focused on addressing social determinants of health in Napa County. From 2019-2021, LHNC partners used human centered design to conduct ethnographic interviews, learning conversations, and focus groups to gain insight into Napa County community members' sense of [Respect and Social Inclusion \(RSI\)](#). During that process, LGBTQ residents outlined the need for a more open-minded, accepting, safe, and positive community that celebrates all, where there is no judgment. Many reported feeling "accepted but not included" in Napa, and wanted a way to clearly determine what spaces were safe for themselves and their families. LHNC partners identified LGBTQ inclusion as a priority and created the [Safe Space Kit project](#) as a way to foster and support welcoming spaces for LGBTQ-identifying community members and their families. Since then, LHNC has distributed over 200 safe space kits throughout Napa County, and converted kits to a bilingual, online platform.

LHNC partners completed a project assessment in October 2022 and found that youth voice was largely absent in community feedback. In January 2023, LHNC launched a youth-focused community engagement design sprint. With collaboration from LGBTQ Connection and First Five Napa County, this report contains the findings of that project.

## Methods

Between January and June of 2023, LHNC partners interviewed Napa County youth ranging in age from 12-21 years. While youth were never specifically asked how they identified, outreach was conducted through Gay Straight Alliance groups, and other sexual orientation and gender affirming youth groups throughout Napa County. During the interview and focus group process, some youth identified themselves as LGBTQIA+, while others defined themselves as allies. Group listening sessions were conducted in person during Gay Straight Alliance meetings at middle schools and high schools, and individual interviews were conducted in person, or over Zoom. Adults who work with youth across the county, including wellness center staff from two high schools, were also engaged through a survey about LGBTQ youth safety, and through subsequent listening sessions and individual interviews. In total, **29 youth community members** and **38 adult community members** who work with youth and/or LGBTQ community members provided feedback for this report.

This report also contains data collected by LGBTQ Connection and First Five Napa County, detailing the number of people served and items distributed as part of their community education efforts. The data collection time period is indicated for each organization and/or project.

## Qualitative Data: *What we heard*

Live Healthy Napa County partners conducted youth listening sessions, individual youth interviews, individual interviews with adults who work with youth, and interviews with staff who provide services to LGBTQ community members. A staff survey (see Appendix I) was also conducted. Youth participants attend school in Napa County and adult participants live and/or work in Napa County. This community data was analyzed to identify the four themes, listed below. The included quotes are from youth listening session and individual youth interviews.

## Teachers set the tone for classroom safety

Youth often expressed the need for a teacher to lead by example. They felt that even in the presence of other students making derogatory comments or bullying, a classroom could still feel safe if a teacher intervened and made clear that this behavior would not be tolerated. Moreover, if a teacher did not intervene and a student defended themselves against derogatory comments or bullying behavior, this would increase the harassment. Students felt safe when teachers normalized introducing pronouns early in the school year and continued the practice with classroom guests or new students. When asked about examples of ways that teachers create safety in classrooms, youth provided examples of teachers weaving LGBTQ history throughout regular subjects and calling out curriculum or subject matter that contained outdated or bigoted content. Youth who have chosen names to match their preferred pronouns felt strongly about the need for adults to use those chosen names. When students were “deadnamed”, the practice of using a person’s birth name rather than their chosen name, they felt unseen and unsafe.

*“My teacher said their pronouns at the beginning of the year, so everyone did it too. And it’s just normal. That was really good.”*

*“Some of the American literature we read has problematic words or themes. My teacher calls it out, and we talk about it. That’s how I know he is safe to talk to.”*

*“Teachers do introductions at the beginning of the year- what name you prefer, and pronouns- that showed their commitment and that they are paying attention.”*

*Having pronouns be casual/normal is important – doesn’t feel forced.*

*“When teachers address queerness- like if they’re teaching history and include a part about gay history. Then you know they get it.”*

*“If I talk back to bullies, they’re definitely just gonna bully me more. The teacher really needs to do it without me asking.”*

*“If I have to go to the teacher to tell on another student, that just make me more of a target.”*

*Please don’t let other students dead name me.*

## Schools hold a high potential for safety

For many youth, school holds the highest potential for safety. At school, there is a sense of belonging that comes from the purpose of the space- its function is to welcome students. Alternatively, downtown areas in most cities in Napa County were described as feeling unwelcoming to youth and designed for tourists. There is the sense that money is required in order to be included or welcomed in public community spaces, and that these spaces are not inherently meant for youth unless they are engaging in commerce.

*“Here at school, I feel safe because people know me here.”*

*“I feel most welcome here at school because I’m like, entitled to be here. I don’t feel like I’m expected or wanted [in] other places.”*

*“Out there, I don’t feel safe, and I don’t feel in danger. It just feels neutral.”*

*“Money is a barrier. You can’t hang out anywhere if you don’t have money.”*

*“It’s hard because places in Napa - usual hang out spots like Oxbow or other tourist driven locations – people can be like ‘what are you doing?’”*

*“I want to get a job downtown so I have a reason to be there.”*

*“I don’t really have money, so I never go downtown . . . I feel most safe here at school, but it could still be better.”*

## Safety comes from people, not from a physical place

Youth described safe spaces as those that are filled with safe people. Pride flags and posters promoting acceptance or celebration of LGBTQ identities are not uncommon on school campuses, but students felt that visual indicators of acceptance did not always equate to accepting behavior. Teachers who made students feel safe were described as open, friendly, and curious about how student's feel. Wellness Centers were identified by many students as a safe space. In one wellness center, students' art and interests are displayed on the walls, and staff take care to create a welcoming, bilingual space. Students often associated feelings of safety with familiarity and confidentiality. Many students who identified as LGBTQ or Transgender/Non-binary (TGNB) expressed that a safe teacher was someone who would not report their conversations back to parents. During listening sessions with adults who worked with children, only a small minority felt confident in their knowledge of a student's right to privacy, or other state protections for LGBTQ youth.

"Sometimes a teacher has a pride flag up, but I know they don't accept me . . . you dead name me and have a pride flag up? No, you're not safe and other students should know that."

"I feel safe with my friends, and with teacher who take the time to get to know me."

"You see pride flags up in classrooms. That's good. Sometimes it tells you that you're safe there, but not always."

"I don't feel safe in classrooms, but there are specific teachers that I feel safe with."

"The places I feel welcome are classrooms that are always open for lunch, where the teacher is happy to see you in their space."

"I love my wellness center. The staff there know me, and it feels like they want to be there."

"One of my friends goes to New Tech and I think they are super open and welcoming there. I don't think staff at my school keep things confidential. I think they would tell parents if a kid comes out."

## Where you can be vulnerable, you can be safe

Nearly all youth interviewed drew a correlation between vulnerability and safety. In spaces that feel safe, youth feel more able to come as their whole selves and express their full identities. Often, safety comes with the presence of friends or people who may visually present as "queer". A safe space was described as a place where everyone feels welcome, and there are no set expectations for gender presentation.

"I feel safe when I'm around people who comfort me, support me, and don't judge me."

"I feel welcome when I can share myself fully, be vulnerable. That is real safety."

"There are no set expectations or rules for who you should be, and feels like there's room for a lot of different kind of people."

"Being welcome is the feeling of being protected, you let your guard down."

"I feel safe with people that are accepting, aren't rude to me."

"Safety is somewhere you can let your guard down, have vulnerability."

# Quantitative Data: *What we know and how we serve*

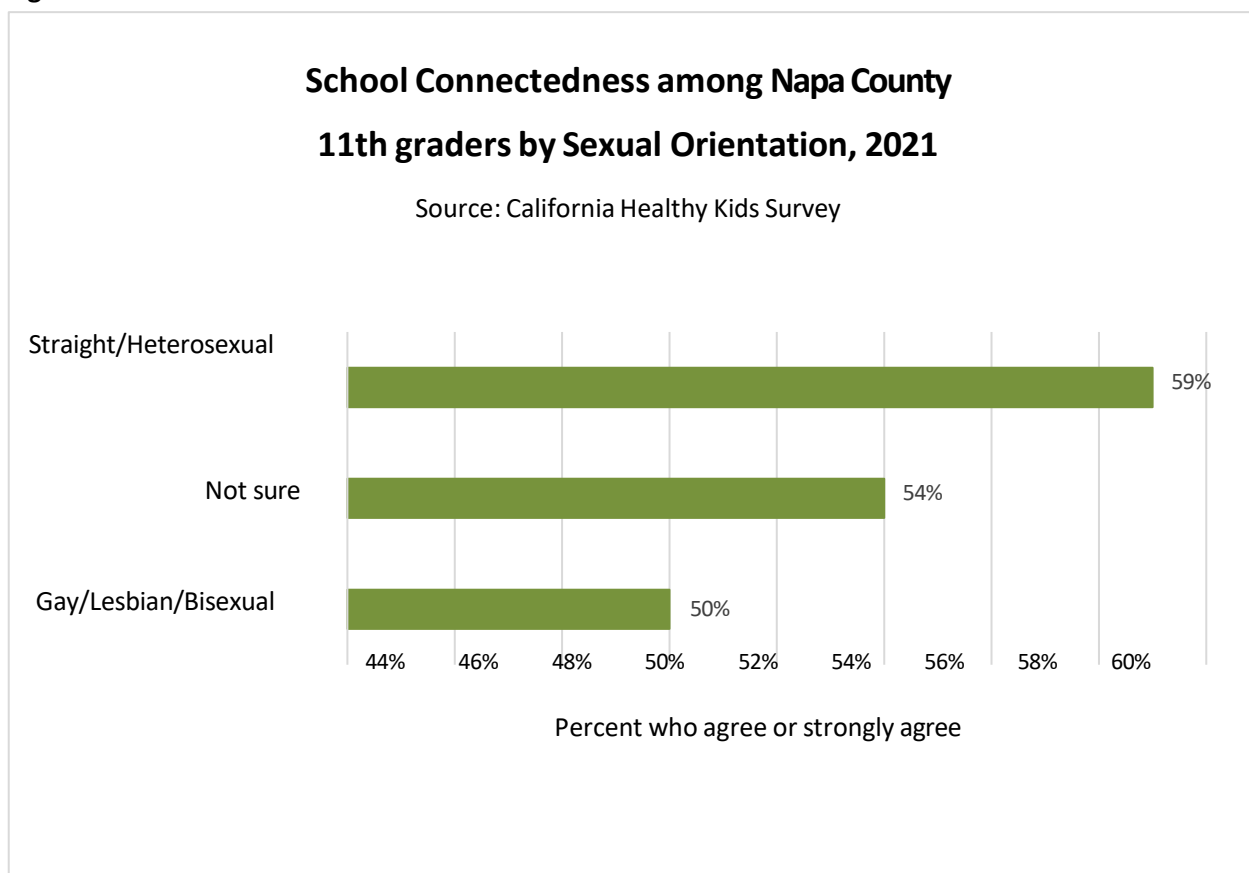
## Connection to Health

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, and more (LGBTQIA+) individuals are more likely than their heterosexual and cis-gender counterparts to experience health related challenges and disparities<sup>1</sup>.

LGBTQIA+ inclusion refers to inclusive health and social services for LGBTQIA+ individuals, as well as efforts to make all spaces safe for and inclusive of those who are LGBTQIA+.

School Connectedness reflects students' belief that peers and adults in the school support, value, and care about their individual wellbeing as well as their academic progress. When youth feel connected to their schools, they are less likely to experience poor mental health, substance use, sexual health issues, and violence.<sup>2</sup> 11<sup>th</sup> graders in Napa County who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual or who reported being unsure of their sexual orientation, reported lower levels of school connectedness compared to youth who identified as straight or heterosexual (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

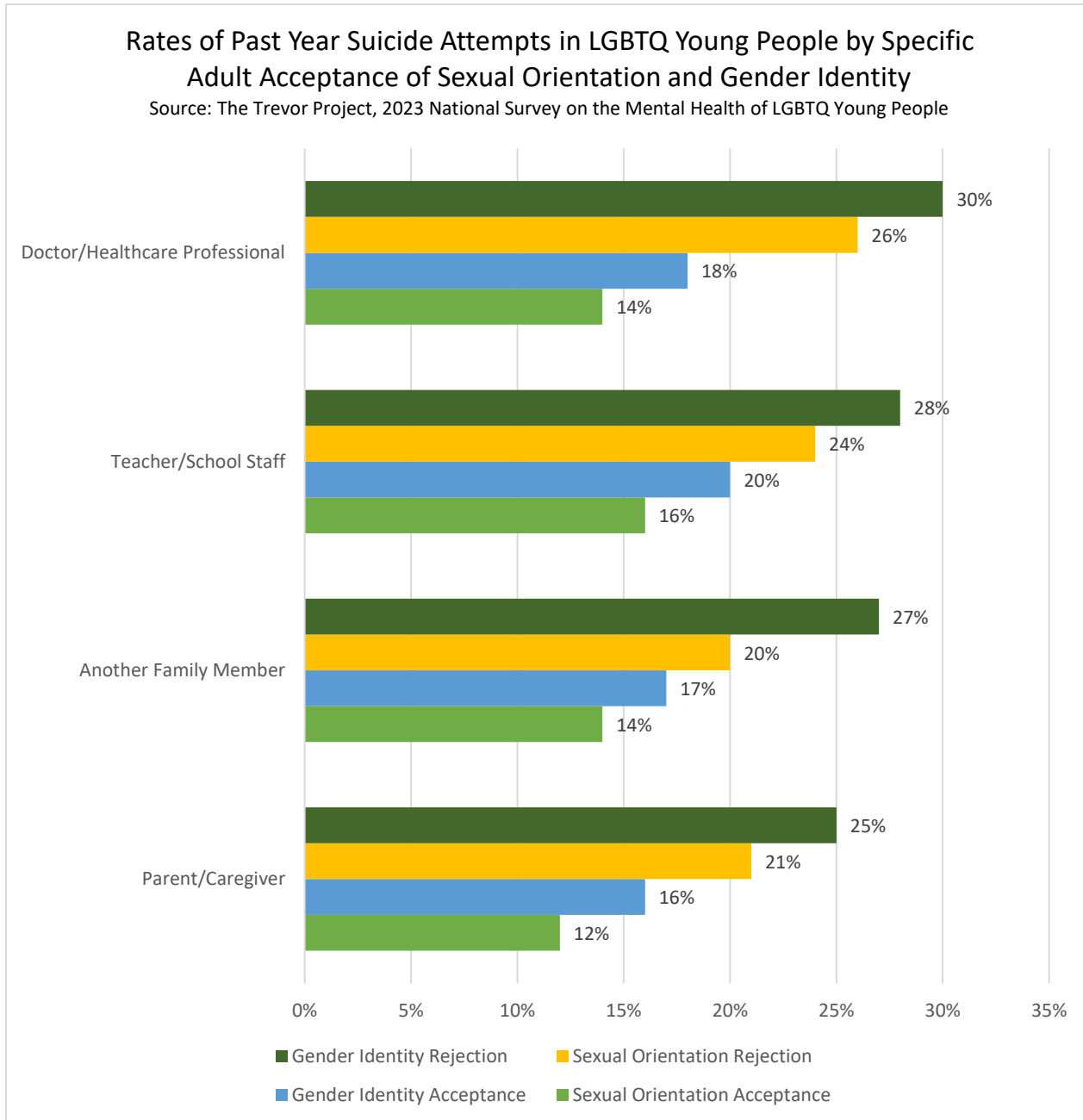


<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/disparities/health-disparities-among-lgbtq-youth.htm>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/school\\_connectedness.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/school_connectedness.htm)

The Trevor Project is the leading suicide prevention and crisis intervention nonprofit organization for LGBTQ+ young people<sup>3</sup>. Data from their 2023 National Survey, capturing the experiences of more than 18,000 LGBTQ+ young people ages 13 to 24 across the United States, shows trends that both LGBTQ and Transgender or Non-binary (TGNB) youth who experienced a feeling of acceptance from at least one adult in their life were less likely to have attempted suicide in the past year when compared to young people who were ‘out’ to an adult and did not feel accepted.<sup>4</sup> These results were similar across a range of relationship types, including teachers. When LGBTQ young people reported that teachers were accepting, they had 43% lower odds of a past year suicide attempt and TGNB young people had 35% lower odds (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

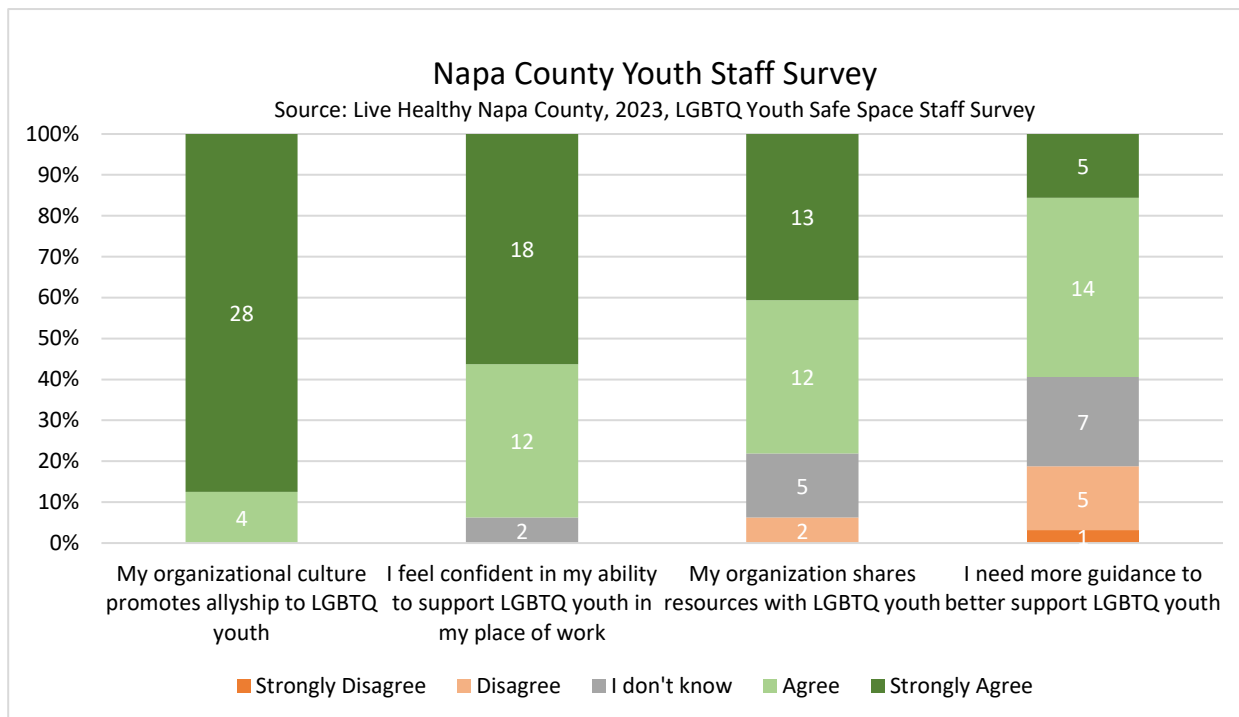
<sup>4</sup> [The Trevor Project. \(2023\). Acceptance from adults is associated with lower rates of suicide attempts among LGBTQ young people.](#)



## Connection to Community

Concurrently with listening sessions, a survey was conducted with adult community members who were in a staff role either teaching or otherwise supporting Napa County youth (ages 12-21). A total of 32 survey responses were recorded from staff throughout Napa County (Figure 3). All 32 survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the organization they work for promotes a culture of allyship for LGBTQ individuals. Additionally, most of the respondents stated that they were confident in their ability to support LGBTQ youth in their workplace and share resources. However, only six staff members disagreed or strongly disagreed that they needed more guidance to better support LGBTQ individuals, highlighting an opportunity to further support staff in serving LGBTQ youth.

Figure 3



## Service by the Numbers

LGBTQ Connection, an initiative fueled by youth and other emerging leaders, helps to foster a healthier, more vibrantly diverse and inclusive community. Each year, LGBTQ Connection engages approximately 3,500 LGBTQ people, their families and community, and trains 500 providers from local organizations across Northern California to increase the safety, visibility and well-being of LGBTQ residents. In Napa and Sonoma Counties, the program operates local LGBTQ community centers, supporting underserved LGBTQ youth and elders. The Napa and Sonoma offices of LGBTQ Connection each provide a safe and trusted space to cultivate hubs of vibrant activities and caring community.<sup>5</sup>

In 2023, LGBTQ Connection reported:

- **35** Older LGBTQ Adults engaged in our social activities

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.lgbtqconnection.org/en/homepage>



- **524** Adults participated in our training on LGBTQ Best Practices/Mental Health
- **740** individuals from Napa County service providers participated in LGBTQ Best Practices/Mental Health
- **83%** of Napa County trainees demonstrated an increase in competence and willingness to change practices to be more inclusive of LGBTQ youth and older adults
- **61** Napa County youth participated in Youth Leadership Teams
- **451** Napa County youth were connected to needed services through peer support groups and 1:1 coaching
- **186** Napa County youth participated in program activities at least two times.
- **94** youth, specifically in Calistoga and American Canyon, participated in monthly social events
- **274** youth participated in social activities that reduced isolation and increased peer connectedness

LGBTQ Connection staff reported the following continuing trends:

- Anti-LGBTQ bullying/hate on school campuses
- Transgender or Non-binary (TGNB) youth not feeling safe using restrooms
- Overall challenge to engage youth in activities outside of school
- LGBTQ youth realizing their identities at younger and younger ages and the overall affirmation and acceptance they receive from peers

LGBTQ Connection staff reported the following new trends:

- Anti-LGBTQ rhetoric in the greater socio-political environment impacting how people understand LGBTQ issues, especially trans issues.
- Parent pushback/questioning of LGBTQ education brought to schools/classrooms.
- Vandalism to LGBTQ Connection's emblem on the Welcome Sign in the City of Napa (this has occurred five times)

First 5 Napa County convenes and mobilizes the community to use systems- and design-thinking to center and lift up our community's young children, their families, and the providers who serve them.<sup>6</sup> First 5 Napa County offers at least three programs that directly impact LGBTQ inclusion: Rainbow Kits, Rainbow Family League, and Rainbow Little Libraries.

Rainbow Kits provide early childhood education settings with resources, training, and materials to promote LGBTQ, diverse family, and gender inclusion in their early childhood spaces. Rainbow Kits are LGBTQ and gender inclusive toolkits for preschools in Napa County. Kits distribution information is included in Figure 4, below:



**Figure 4**

Year	Providers Trained	Number of Kits Distributed
2020-2021	167	64
2021-2022	248	489
2022-2023	43	17
2023-2024	5	15
<b>2020-2024</b>	<b>Total Providers Trained = 463</b>	<b>Total Kits Distributed =585</b>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.first5napa.org/>

Rainbow Family League (RFL) is a bilingual parent/caregiver education program that aims to help families have conversations about race, racism, gender, LGBTQ inclusion, diversity and standing up against unfairness. Rainbow Family League teams embark on a six month long “season” that includes up to four virtual “team practice sessions” and two in-person practice sessions. During the 2022-23 school year, Rainbow Family League had 21 participating families from the City of Napa, Angwin, and American Canyon. First 5 Napa County distributed 294 diverse and inclusive children’s books to the families through the monthly “equipment bags.”

Because of their participation in Rainbow Family League 2022-23 participants reported:

- **90%** Feel a sense of belonging in their community
- **80%** Feel more civically engaged

**All** adults saw growth in confidence in:

- Talking about diverse families with their child
- Talking about race/racism with their child
- Talking about race/racism with other adults
- Speaking up against unfairness and discrimination

**All** adults felt they have fewer biases around race after RFL

- **90%** of Grown Ups reported a growth in their own knowledge around race/racism and understanding of LGBTQ and gender diverse children & adults.
- **88%** of Families report after participating in RFL their child is:
  - More empathetic
  - Using accurate language to describe human differences
  - Recognizing unfairness and has language to describe it
  - Able to stand up for others in the face of discrimination

Rainbow Little Libraries provide children in our community with books that reflect diverse races, cultures, genders, and family structures and give grown-ups equipment to help them have conversations about race, gender, LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) inclusion, and standing up against unfairness with their children. Decorated with a wide range of colors and images, each library has been installed in neighborhoods that previously did not have Little Free Libraries. There are currently 16 Rainbow Little Library locations across Napa County. Book distribution information is in Figure 5.

**Figure 5**

Year	Number of Books
June 2021	455
September 2021	140
Fall 2022	460
<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>Total 1055 books</b>



## Barriers and Strategies

In 2024, the work of First 5 Napa County and LGBTQ Connection continues with great success, and increasing health and safety for LGBTQ youth remains a high priority for these organizations and the people they serve. Napa County HHSA and Providence Queen of the Valley recently published their [2023 Community Health Assessment](#), naming Race Equity and LGBTQ Inclusion as a health priority area. This joint assessment will be operationalized through each respective organizations' Community Health Improvement Plan, naming strategies to address this social determinant of health. The funds and programs offered by all of these organizations present an opportunity to address this issue as a collaborative, leveraging resources and innovation to support schools and communities seeking to improve health outcomes for LGTBQ and TGNB youth.

### Barriers

Staff surveyed about safety for LGBTQ youth named many barriers to increasing inclusion and safety for LGBTQ and TGNB youth, including:

- Lack or loss of funding
- Other youth who are unsupportive or use negative slang in classroom environments
- A lack of education for both staff and parents on how to better serve LGBTQ youth (they want to, but aren't sure how)
- A lack of support for LGBTQ-identifying staff within schools
- Adults in leadership positions who are uncomfortable with making outward, intentional supportive statements, including inclusive mission and vision statements
- "Small Town" stigma against LGBTQ issues and identities
- School environments that don't allow or promote fluidity as trans/queer expression

### Strategies

Youth engaged in this project were able to articulate many strategies that increase their sense of safety in the classroom and community including:

- Normalizing the regular and consistent use of chosen pronouns during introductions
- Including the experience and contribution of LGBTQ individuals and communities as a regular practice in curriculum development and presentation (commonly known as curriculum infusion), community events, assessments, and other engagement activities
- Ensuring adults who engage with youth understand the legal right to privacy of students in California
- Creating environments where youth of many identities see themselves reflected
- Calling out and interrupting anti-LGBTQ bullying when it occurs
- Amplifying, and providing funding for, training opportunities that increase participants' knowledge of LGTBQ experiences and best practices for creating inclusive spaces

## Resources

- Policy recommendations to support LGBTQ students: <https://www.glsen.org/activity/respect-all-policy-recommendations-support-lgbtq-students>
- Developing LGBTQ inclusive classroom resources: [https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/GLSEN LGBTQ Inclusive Curriculum Resource 2019 0.pdf](https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/GLSEN_LGBTQ_Inclusive_Curriculum_Resource_2019_0.pdf)
- LGBTQ and TGNB student rights in California: <https://www.aclusocal.org/en/lgbtq-know-your-rights>
- Anti-bias goals from the National Association for the Education of Young Children: [Understanding Anti-Bias Education: Bringing the Four Core Goals to Every Facet of Your Curriculum | NAEYC](#)
- If you are interested in learning more about rainbow kits for your classroom, please email [admin@first5napa.org](mailto:admin@first5napa.org)
- If you are interested in learning more about trainings opportunities from LGBTQ connection, please email [bailie@lgbtqconnection.org](mailto:bailie@lgbtqconnection.org)

# Appendix I

## LGBTQ Safe Space Staff Survey



Live Healthy Napa County is a community health collaborative that seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone in Napa County. One of our action groups is focused on increasing the amount and awareness of LGBTQ safe space in Napa County. We are interested in exploring what work is already being done, or what support might be needed, in order to create safe spaces for LGBTQ youth.

If you serve youth in any capacity, we would love your feedback on the questions below.

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### Demographic data questions:

- What type of organization do you work for (select all that apply)?  
Education, Childcare, After school activity, recreation/sports, library, religious org
- Where is your organization located?  
American Canyon, Napa, Yountville, Calistoga, St. Helena, Rutherford, Oakville, Angwin, Deer Park, Pope Valley
- What are the ages of youth you interact with (select all that apply)?  
0-4, 5-8, 9-12, 13-17, 18-22

### Statements (Strongly Agree, Agree, I don't know, Disagree, Strongly Disagree):

It is important that my organization be a safe space for LGBTQ youth  
My organization has a designated physical space for LGBTQ youth  
My organization has an affinity group for LGBTQ youth  
My organization visually demonstrates our allyship to LGBTQ youth through stickers, flags, signs, etc.  
My organizational culture promotes allyship to LGBTQ youth  
I feel confident in my ability to support LGBTQ youth in my place of work  
I need more guidance to better support LGBTQ youth  
My organization shares resources with LGBTQ youth to connect them with LGBTQ organizations and services in our community.

### Long form response:

- What are some successes you've had in creating safe spaces for LGBTQ youth?
- What are some barriers you've experienced in creating safe spaces for LGBTQ youth?
- What LGBTQ resources are you aware of that support youth locally?
- Can we contact you with resources or information about LGBTQ safe spaces?