

OC HUMAN RELATIONS
COMMISSION

Listening Sessions

**Transgender Community
Listening Sessions
Report 2014**



OC Human Relations

Building community by fostering respect, resolving conflict and pursuing equality



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“Transgender is an umbrella term and can include many whose personal experiences with gender tends to cross traditional male/female boundaries and whose gendered appearance or presentation does not conform to customary gender and/or social role standards, based on their assigned birth anatomy.”

— Pat McGee, MSW

Introduction

The Orange County Human Relations Commission was created by the OC Board of Supervisors to eliminate prejudice, intolerance and discrimination. One of the tools developed by the Commission to learn about the diverse communities emerging in Orange County, is the *Listening Session*. These field trips to the venues where various communities gather are thought to be an upgrade to the Public Hearing approach for capturing and understanding the stories of unique groups.

The Commission considers it a privilege to visit these communities in their cultural settings in order to hear their stories, especially when some may not attend public hearings, but have important things to share. The Commission looks at this as an opportunity to listen and hear, rather than to teach and tell. In this way, peoples’ stories are told in the manner that evokes the natural communication style of each community, rather than making it conform to the norm of the listening body.

Listening Sessions are perceived to be respectful and engaging by the communities where the Commission has conducted them. As commissioners, we have valued the appreciation of those whom we are honoring with our attention, and we would like to share the insights we gain with the Board of Supervisors, other policy makers and the Orange County public.

Background

On September 11, 2014 the Orange County Human Relations Commission convened its members at The Center OC, a nonprofit organization in Santa Ana that provides support for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) communities in Orange County. At the request of the Chair, Ken Inouye, the Commission went to The Center OC to conduct a *Listening Session* focused on members of the Transgender community.

Last summer, Chair Inouye, along with Commission staff, attended a memorial vigil for Zoraida Reyes, a well-known Transgender activist that was found dead in Anaheim under suspicious circumstances. At the vigil, Inouye realized how little he knew about the Transgender community and felt the Commission needed to better-understand the needs and challenges they face. So, the Commission convened a *Listening Session* attended by Commissioners, members of the public, staff, and Board

Members of the nonprofit arm of the Commission—OC Human Relations.

Listening Sessions are one of the tools developed by OC Human Relations Commission to learn about the diverse communities living in Orange County. These sessions involve visits to venues where various communities gather, to listen to their stories and better-understand the experiences of these diverse groups.

Overview of Testimony

Pat McGee, MSW, a member of the local Transgender community, gave an overall orientation to the Transgender community. According to McGee, “Transgender is an umbrella term and can include many whose personal experiences with gender tends to cross traditional male/female boundaries and whose gendered appearance or presentation does not conform to customary gender and/or social role standards, based on their assigned birth anatomy.”

“Consider, though, that defining gender is highly subjective and can vary a great deal from one person to the next. There is no ‘one way’ to be Transgender.” McGee described three main elements of the Transgender community as being defined by:

1. **Gender Identity:** *How you feel inside;*
2. **Sexual Orientation:** *Who you are attracted to;*
and
3. **Gender Expression:** *How you express your gender.*

McGee placed the Orange County Transgender population at 60,000 who express their gender different than their birth gender. He went on to say that there were 9,000 Transgender OC residents in “Full Transition.” McGee said that the suicide rate among Transgender individuals was 40%.

Four additional guests: Jackie Valdez, Jennifer Leyva, Gloria Sanchez, and Katya de la Riva spoke about the intersections of being a Transgender woman and person of color. They shared their stories of institutional discrimination, police abuse, rejection from the greater community, difficulty in finding jobs, a lack of trained health care providers, unaffordable hormonal treatments, and disrespect from the greater public. They described being harassed and disrespected by local law enforcement as well.

Key Issues Discussed

- **Sex segregation** in institutions always causes problems for Transgender individuals because their affinity is different than their birth gender, yet they are grouped by their birth gender.
- **Healthcare professionals** are often inexperienced in the health needs and special issues for Transgender patients.
- **Drugs** are expensive and often unavailable for Transgender hormonal therapy, leading to a black market of dangerous drugs that are sold on the street.
- **Jail** is a dangerous place for Transgender individuals who may be segregated by their birth gender even if they are expressing themselves as the opposite gender. This can place them at risk, and expose them to extreme humiliation as they go through the process of disrobing and being grouped in the jail.
- **Housing** can be hard to find, as landlords may react negatively to Transgender individuals and deny them accommodations.
- **Social Services** may be insensitive and not take into account the special needs of Transgender individuals.
- **Police** may stereotype Transgender individuals as being involved in sex trafficking and drug use, and harass or disrespect them.
- **TransPhobia** causes some Transgender individuals to fear calling police, wary of what they will face.
- **Employers** discriminate against Transgender individuals in hiring based on prejudice as well as public reaction to Transgender individuals.
- **The public** does not respect Transgender individuals, looking upon them as ridiculous, often making fun of them, judging them before getting to know them.

Recommended Commission Actions

1. **Add a section** to the annual OC Human Relations Hate Crime Report to define the Transgender community and explain their plight, including the fact that very low reporting of crimes is unfortunately the reality, and consequently, the reported hate crime numbers are very low in relation to the suspected level of hate crimes faced by the Transgender community.
2. **Compile Transgender-targeted hate crimes** in the category related to Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual hate crimes until such a time as there are enough to separately report them. Make sure that the category is not abbreviated to Gay and Lesbian, but remains consistently inclusive throughout.
3. **Do more outreach** to the Transgender community, in collaboration with The Center OC, in order to raise awareness, build trust, offer assistance to increase the reporting of hate crimes and improve the relationship with local law enforcement.
4. **Promote education** of the public and institutions about the Transgender community in order to dispel myths and derogatory stereotypes.
5. **Conduct a bilingual presentation** to the Latina Transgender group, (TEA), to:
 - a. Encourage hate crime reporting,
 - b. Offer assistance with police complaints, and
 - c. Provide an official channel for assistance.
6. **Educate youth** about respecting and accepting the LGBT community through OC Human Relations BRIDGES program.
7. **Include members** of the Transgender community in the Sheriff's Academy Training on diverse communities.

OC Human Relations Commission's mission is to seek out the causes of tension and conflict, discrimination and intolerance, and eliminate those causes.

Thank You to the People Who Make Our Work Possible



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*Listening Sessions,
a project of OC Human
Relations Commission*

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