



Module 14: Mazzoni Center

Case Study: Nurit Shein

I'm Nurit Shein, I'm the Executive Director of Mazzoni Center. We are an LGBT, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender health organization in Philadelphia. And essentially the only one in the region and one of six or seven such in the country.

Mazzoni Center started off as a gay and lesbian health organization, became an AIDS organization when AIDS hit, started with the gay community and went back to our roots of an LGBT health organization.

We have a very robust continuum of care. From prevention to care. We do a lot of HIV testing and counseling in the community. We do a lot of education in the schools about bullying, self esteem, healthy relationships. We have a very large behavior health component, case management, housing, and of course, a medical practice that is kind of the binder of all these other services. Including legal, food services and so on.

I think the importance of Mazzoni Center is that, first of all, we're one stop shopping. Two, we are a specific LGBT organization. That is not to say that these services are out there for people in various other organizations. But with the understanding of our communities, and with the compassion and the expertise and the professionalism that we bring to the service of our individuals, I think that is the uniqueness of Mazzoni Center.

Many of our clients and our patients shy away from the health system because of stigma, either HIV or LGBT. And really want to come to a place where they don't have to explain themselves. Where people understand who they are and where they don't have to feel less than. So, we have seen the organization grow in the last ten years many fold. We started off with, I started off, with less than 9 employees, and now we're 100 with serving very few people to reaching over 30,000 individuals every year. So, I think that really speaks to the need that is out there and to the gap that we are fulfilling.

If I think about where do we fit within the health care of Philadelphia, I think we are a very important component of the continuum of care for all Philadelphians. We treat a lot of uninsured people. And we say that everybody is entitled to the same health care, regardless of their ability to pay. And I think that has been another very unique thing about Mazzoni Center. We don't turn anybody away.



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So, I think there is a place for us within the continuum of public health in Philadelphia. And we're filling a gap, most certainly.

Well, I think, first of all, it was in response to a need. Because we have a certain capacity, there's so much we can do. The best way to raise awareness, increase expertise, is to train other providers. We've been teaching residents and medical students and legal students and case managers. We have been having interns here and students from the beginning. Because what we really want to do is mainstream LGBT. And hopefully, we will talk ourselves out of business, but it hasn't happened in the last 35 years, I don't know that it will happen in the next 35 years. But certainly there is a need for expertise in our population with other providers. So, that has been one of the very important points and philosophical outlooks, that we need to teach other people to be mindful and aware and professional about treating our populations.

Well, there are many aspects of what they should know, but I think if you're talking about students of public health, I think data collection about LGBT issues, and LGBT demographics, and knowledge about that is one of the key things that we are currently missing. There's not enough data collected and there's not enough knowledge that we have in order to put resources, or to demand resources for the LGBT population. So, inclusion in surveys, demographics about the population, questions, again and again and again we come up against going for grants or resources and they say to us, "Well, what are you basing it on?" And I'm saying, "Well, mostly gut feeling because of what we see in our population and in our little world." But there isn't enough data out there and we're not collecting enough data. So, if somebody from public health will take that in to account, that would be a great thing.

I think, first of all, that there isn't enough curriculum about LGBT in the public health schools and in medical schools. If you look at all the medical schools in the country, probably they teach about five hours about LGBT. And mostly it is about HIV and not competency. So, I think more of that is definitely necessary. How we fit in to that is we have some manuals, we have some trainings. We can help but people need to really seek that and create a very structured curriculum that will raise awareness, and professionalism, and competency with the students as they mature and go out in to the world and become health care professionals.