

## Homeless Shelter Workers in Midwestern Urban Centers

### Archie Green Fellows Project AFC2016034

#### Oral History of Channyn Parker, Project Manager for the TransLife Center

Chicago, Illinois on October 19, 2016

#### Summary of Interview

Channyn Parker works as the Manager of the TransLife Center of Chicago House. The TransLife Center is located at 6027 N. Kenmore, Chicago, Illinois 60624. Her job responsibilities include assisting transgender individuals who are experiencing homelessness to access services such as healthcare, housing, legal help, and employment support.

This interview took place in Channyn's office at the TransLife Center.

#### Interview Log

- 00:00:01 Introduction
- 00:00:20 Channyn's is the TransLife Center's Project Manager; TranLife Center provides the most comprehensive services for transgender people in Midwest; offers medical, legal, employment, social, and housing as the most common needs of trans people she sees;
- 00:01:01 History of the TransLife Center building: initially housing for nine women there; added scattered-site apartments throughout Chicago; then began offering more employment, legal, medical, and social support;
- 00:02:39 Details about transgender people and homelessness; challenges of social services and other systems that are gendered; violence; misconceptions; assumption that trans women must be engaging in sex work and therefore refusing them shelter;
- 00:05:18 Community demand for TransLife Center: over 200 unduplicated users of services this year; additionally many repeat users; more about Channyn's role as a connector, outreach to drop-ins, jail, and medical facilities, and building relationships;
- 00:07:29 How Channyn learned to do this work; first worked in adolescent pediatrics and HIV; drawn to TransLife for the treatment of the whole person; her personal experiences disclosing her gender identity; the need to educate people and a story about her allergies misinterpreted as an HIV symptom;
- 00:09:53 Funding for her work; a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) federal grant; private donors; Center for Disease Control grant; the Wachowski sisters who are well-known movie producers;
- 00:10:58 Requirements of her position is to assist 50 trans women of color per year who are HIV impacted; current HIV crisis; observation that HIV used to be tracked only in males, without a category specific to trans women;
- 00:12:07 Weekly workflow; she sees at least 50 people each week; Monday is drop-in at Trans Center when people come for help with housing; medical such as hormones, HIV care, general

- health concerns; legal, such as name changes and gender marker changes [such as M or F on passport, etc.]; employment, and more. Channyn manages staff; importance of boundaries when serving people you know in the trans community. Tuesdays, paperwork from home; Thursdays she is in the jail;
- 00:13:58 Details about Channyn's jail work; groups with trans identified women incarcerated for non-violent offenses, "survival crimes"; group expanded to many others, non-trans; teaching how to navigate systems; find common ground; story about a woman recidivist whose life was changed;
- 00:19:31 Channyn's work at University of Chicago youth drop-in; primarily hetero-identified;
- 00:20:30 Channyn on transferability of her skills in that "compassion is always transferable";
- 00:22:00 Reflection on her youth; never wanted to see others go without when she could share;
- 00:23:23 The urgency in the trans community for limited resources; fear of funding cuts; sometimes leads to a hoarding or system-cheating mentality because of fear of not surviving; idea that people running for elected office should be mandated to do nonprofit work first so they understand what they would be cutting; slowly seeing a change in misperceptions about trans people; challenges in breaking down barriers such as, "I will serve them, but I won't hire them."
- 00:28:15 Challenges of the job; motivating people to do the heavy lifting; people who fear systems; doing the work for them is contrary to helping them; a lesson she teaches using play money about giving versus empowering; racism and the benevolence of charity and being "loved to sleep";
- 00:34:40 Measuring success often by how she hears from people less and less; story about running into a former client; success varies from person to person;
- 00:36:08 Mostly works with young people, but ages range up to 60 years old;
- 00:36:31 Whether her job existed decades ago; possibly as hospice and working on AIDS; Channyn's office was formerly an AIDS hospice bedroom; her belief that social workers have always existed, before credentials and bureaucracy; Jane Addams; Ida B. Wells; Jesus as a social worker; everyone can be a social worker; 1980s; ACT UP;
- 00:39:41 The future of her work; young people and gender non-conforming, non-binary; human above all things. "Trans" is a label for now;
- 00:41:22 How this work changed her perspective; a call to serve; the work of being human;
- 00:44:14 Advice to someone getting in to this work: "remember you"; know your limitations; you're not a savior; hard work and heart work;
- 00:45:42 End