

RISE- Reducing Isolation Through Support & Empowerment

The Center for Sexuality & Gender Diversity – LGBTQ+ Priority Population



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RISE Description & Implementation

The Center's Community- Defined Evidence Program (CDEP), Reducing Isolation through Support and Empowerment (RISE), seeks to prevent and/or reduce depression, anxiety, self-harm, and post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from isolation, discrimination, and oppression. In Phase II, RISE served individuals in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and the broader community in Bakersfield.

The Center's Community- Defined Evidence Program (CDEP), The components of RISE are:

- Supportive Workshops around marginalized identities
- Affirming 1-1 counseling for the community
- Cultural Competency Education and Training for local behavioral health professionals
- Counseling Intern Program for affirming training and workforce development
- Affirming Programs and Events for Youth, Teens, Young Adults, and Adults in Bakersfield and Kern County



Overview

The Center for Sexuality & Gender Diversity is located at 707 18th St. in Bakersfield, Kern County, CA

CSGD staffed by amazing community professionals who bring passion, care, love, and joy to their work. Shoutout to our team carrying out this work!

- Dani Muñoz (they/them)- Executive Director
- Christine Paulsen (she/her)- Director of Mental Health Services
- Artemis Zene (they/them)- Community Engagement Liaison
- Fry Friend (he/they/ze)- Youth & Young Adult Programming Coordinator
- Iz/Isaac McCann (any pronouns)- Adult Programming Coordinator

Evaluation Design and Methods

Both the RISE program and this evaluation were rooted in the community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach. Evaluation was conducted throughout Phase 2 (2023-mid 2025).

- The Center worked with Health Management Associates, a national research and consulting firm skilled in conducting CBPR for the social determinants of health with 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, to develop and conduct this evaluation.
- The evaluation included both quantitative and qualitative data collection efforts, including participation data, surveys, focus groups, and interviews.
- Participants were Teens, Young Adults, and Adults who were counseling clients, workshop and program participants, or interns.

* The Center went through 4 Executive Director Changes since 2023 which impacted our numbers but data shows upward trend with stability	2023	2024	Mid-2025
Workshop Rotations Held and number of participants	6 rotations held 109 participants	4 rotations held 80 Participants	4 rotations held 140 Participants
Adult & All Ages Affirming Events Held and number of participants	27 events held 165 participants	43 events held 358 participants	81 events held 995 participants
Youth & Young Adult Program Events	9 events held 89 participants	14 events held 44 participants	16 events held 87 participants
Number of Interns and Counseling Sessions Held	7 interns 1290 sessions held	8 interns 676 sessions held	5 interns 507 sessions held

RISE Evaluation findings demonstrate that The Center has successfully established itself as a vital community resource that effectively addresses identity-related mental health concerns while simultaneously revealing critical gaps in broader resilience support and systemic accessibility barriers.

- The Center demonstrates exceptional success in fostering 2SLGBTQIA+ identity acceptance (**100% positive attitudes**) and community belonging (**90% feeling like community members**).
- However, participants show concerning deficits in stress management and recovery capabilities (**64–80% reporting limited confidence in handling stress**).
- *This paradox identified through data triangulation suggests that while community-based identity affirmation effectively prevents identity-related mental health problems, it does not automatically translate to broader psychological resilience skills.*

Quantitative data from surveys were analyzed using Excel. Because of small sample sizes, no inferential statistics could be run. Therefore, analyses are limited to for descriptive analyses, such as participant demographic description, participation, and program monitoring.

Areas of Convergence

Community Connectedness and Belonging: Quantitative survey data and qualitative findings across all focus groups demonstrate remarkable convergence regarding The Center's success in fostering community belonging. *Survey data shows 90 percent of respondents agree that they feel like community members, while qualitative findings consistently describe The Center as "welcoming" and fostering "lasting friendships that extend beyond the physical Center." This convergence across methods and participant groups provides strong evidence of The Center's community-building effectiveness.*

Staff Cultural Responsiveness: Data triangulation reveals unanimous positive perceptions across all sources. *Survey data shows 91–100 percent of respondents strongly agreeing that staff respect their diverse identities, while focus group participants across age groups consistently praised staff for "making everyone feel welcome" and respecting cultural differences.*

Transportation as Primary Barrier: *Qualitative findings demonstrate complete convergence across youth and adult focus groups in identifying transportation as the most significant participation barrier.* Youth participants described "20 minutes plus having to walk 15 minutes from the bus stop," while adults characterized Bakersfield's bus system as "terrible," with service ending at 6:00 p.m. *This consistent finding across participant groups indicates a systematic accessibility challenge.*

Areas of Divergence

Resilience and Coping Capacity: A concerning divergence emerges between quantitative resilience measures and qualitative descriptions of personal growth. While survey data reveals that 64–80 percent of respondents report limited confidence in handling stress and recovering from setbacks, qualitative findings emphasize personal development, with participants describing becoming "a lot more social" and "more comfortable speaking up." *This divergence suggests either measurement limitations or that The Center's community-building benefits may not translate to broader stress management capabilities.*

Gender Identity Pride: *A significant divergence appears in survey data regarding gender identity, where 60 percent reported positive attitudes about their gender identity but only 10 percent claimed to feel proud of it. This internal inconsistency within the quantitative data warrants further exploration and suggests potential measurement issues or complex identity dynamics not captured in qualitative findings.*

Method-Specific Insights

Quantitative-Only Findings: *Survey data uniquely revealed the concerning resilience gaps and mixed future outlook (only 55% expecting quality of life improvements), patterns not explicitly discussed in focus groups. This suggests participants may not spontaneously identify these challenges as priorities.*

Qualitative-Only Findings: Focus groups uniquely identified organizational instability impacts, specific programming preferences (structured vs. open format), and detailed suggestions for improvement. Interview data alone revealed the extent of capacity strain on the clinical supervisor and infrastructure gaps.

Next Steps for The Center

Program Development Recommendations based on Evaluation:

- **Integrated Resilience Programming:** Develop explicit stress management and coping skills programming that builds upon the strong community foundation while addressing the identified resilience gaps. This programming should complement rather than replace community-building activities. **** developed in 2025 and initiated starting in 2026**
- **Transportation Equity Initiative:** Implement comprehensive transportation support including carpooling coordination, shuttle services from transit centers, and virtual/hybrid programming options to address the universally identified accessibility barrier. **** not yet started- however The Center moved and consolidated to one building in a more accessible location at the beginning of 2026.**
- **Targeted TGNC Inclusion:** Develop specific outreach and programming strategies to address transgender feminine underrepresentation, potentially including targeted support groups and mentorship programs. **** Initiated development and working to find community facilitators**
- **Intersectional Programming Expansion:** Build upon the identified need for POC-specific programming by developing systematic intersectional approaches that address the complex identity dynamics revealed in qualitative findings. **** initiated development with goal for a BIPOC workshop space starting fall 2026**