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Intro by:

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Written by:

Zarie Locke (they/them), Peer Specialist/Community Health Worker at Victory Programs

As we've moved through each story throughout this project, I've become even more convinced of the power of storytelling. This

month is no different. I had the pleasure of speaking with Zarie Locke (they/them), a true harm reduction jack of all trades with an incredibly bright future.

Zarie talks us through their experience as a harm reductionist in downtown Boston and highlights the glaring health disparities for PWUD and TGNC folks. Their passion is centered around cultivating spaces for QTBIPOC folks to feel affirmed — which often means educating other service providers.

In addition to this blog post, we invite you to check out Zarie's [recorded interview](#) as well as this [Instagram post](#) about them and their work.

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I have always believed Harm Reduction touches nearly everything in our activism and professional lives. For me, it's looked like: talking to a board of directors about housing equity for LGBTQ Boston residents, teaching students about sex education, walking the streets of Boston giving out clean needles and Narcan, and offering free HIV and STI testing on the spot. It's in just about everything I do.

Harm reduction has always been at the forefront of my mind as one of the main pillars in supporting someone on their health journey, as well as remembering that everyone's journey to being healthy or

engaging in safer and/or healthier behaviors looks different. Harm reduction makes sense once we consider how racism, ableism, and classism shape the medical world. We can understand healthy looks like all sorts of things. It could be taking a walk every day, using clean needles every time you inject a substance, or making sure to get tested every three months.

In the world of harm reduction, trans, non binary, gender nonconforming, and intersex bodies are underrepresented to the point that we are almost invisible. Sadly, even today, there are few LGBTQ spaces for people to talk about harm reduction and substance use, find clean supplies without fear, get into a sober house, or detox.

There are always the questions of, ‘will they respect my pronouns?’ or, “will they understand how things are different for me when seeking support because of my sexuality?” I aim to ensure that the spaces I can reach are safe, accessible, and kind for queer and trans folks through my work at Victory Programs, my activism, and supporting other community members doing similar work in Boston and across the country.

One of the best examples is when a few clients told me they wanted to find a sober living program safe for trans people and had difficulty doing so. They told me that most places that said they were LGBTQ-friendly didn’t have trans and nonbinary folks in mind. In

Massachusetts, we have one sober living program specifically for the entire LGBTQ community, which opened up a few years ago in Holyoke and is still our only housing program for queer and trans people. I got this client in after someone graduated from the program. My client now had access to a space free from misgendering, a space that was understanding and also kind where they could work on their sobriety with a stable roof over their head. They checked in with me a few months ago and told me they were six months sober and doing volunteer harm reduction work to curb HIV and STI rates in their communities.

I don't think they would have been able to pursue their sobriety goals without a space that held their entire identity with kindness and humanity. Without a doubt, we need more spaces for LGBTQ community members, no matter where they are in their health and substance use journey.

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If you would like to get in contact with Zarie, please email them at: zlocke@vpi.org

Here is a list of the resources recommended by Zarie. Check them out and share them with your contacts!

This is what Zarie has to say, “You can check out some of the work in Boston and support them; all our work intersects. Our one collective goal at the end of the day is to alleviate and eliminate health disparities that queer and trans folks face to foster thriving futures.”

-Black and Pink Massachusetts

-Transgender Emergency Fund

-Mental Health Association (MHA)

-Victory Programs