

Key speaker Plenary Conference

Developing informed and affirming care for queer youth: research progress and participant reflection



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Social support provides unique and essential benefits to LGBTQIA+ youth in care. It can offer them tools to deal with the social stress derived from experiences of discrimination and violence suffered due to their queer identity, but also help them overcome the adversity experienced in their lives, such as abuse and neglect in their families, removal from home or the experience in multiple foster care placements. The social stress theory and the minority stress theory suggest that people who belong to multiple disadvantaged groups may face particular obstacles to benefit from social support. The exposure to compounded multiple disadvantages has shown to have a negative impact on the mental and physical health of LGBTQIA+ individuals. Specifically, LGBTQIA+ youth in care may not have access to the same sources, level, and quality of social support than their cis-heterosexual peers. Therefore, it is important to explore what are the characteristics of social support that buffer the risks for this group and promote their resilience resources.

In this presentation we build on the knowledge originated in two participatory research projects on the experiences and needs of LGBTQIA+ youth in out of home care: the Audre project (the Netherlands) and the Firmus project (Cantabria, Spain). Through a series of interviews and a focus group we have learned that LGBTQIA+ youth in care profit from social support from their families to a lesser extent, and more from peers,

professionals, educators and other adults. Strong familial-like bonds are often formed with other queer youth. The participation in LGBT groups, activism and other forms of community connectedness seem to positively impact their wellbeing and mental health. Moreover, the positive experiences of social support seem to have a positive impact in the development of their LGBTQIA+ identities. During our presentation, we will reflect on ways of transferring the lessons learned into more supportive and affirming foster care systems, and we will discuss the responsibilities of the research field towards this group of youth.