

### **S3 — Episode 4 — Community Involvement in LGBTQ Research**

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Tara talks to Glynnis Lieb, Executive Director of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta. Episode 4 is the last episode of Season 3. Please join us when the podcast returns next fall.

Tara: Hello, and welcome to season three of Gender Sexuality School. I'm Tara Goldstein, and we're podcasting from Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Today, Dr. Glynnis Lieb, the executive director of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta joins us to talk about the work of the ISSMS and some of the current research and professional development programming the institute is engaged in. Glynnis! Welcome to Gender Sexuality School, we're so happy to have you here.

Glynnis: Thank you. It's great to be here. That was a lot, that was a lot of words in that introduction, eh? Sorry about the name. We're working on a new name.

Tara: That's interesting, why don't you tell us a little bit about the new name, and tell us a little bit about the Institute and the kind of work you do?

Glynnis: Absolutely. So, we started out as Camp Firefly about 15 years ago, and that was then the project of a doctoral student and a prof on faculty in education. And the idea behind the camp was that was, as sad but true as it sounds that youth needed kind of to kind of steel themselves from the school year -- for the school year ahead, K to 12. And so, they were doing this weekend retreat, prior to the start of school in September, and then quickly discovered that needed to be more than just a weekend retreat and turned it into a self-esteem and leadership building camp for 2SLGBTQ youth that that's now run, you know, annually for 15 years. But from that, other projects emerged, and so from, you know, from camp, we, we adapted other projects, and then became an actual Institute on campus, at the University of Alberta, and so we do primarily programming for youth. And when we say youth, it's typically under 30, all the way down. And that too, we have a lot of things going on right now. We provide free psychological services to youth and their families. We have in school programs for K to 12, called Firefly in Schools, and then Where the Rivers Meet, which are educational and advocacy programs for queer trans students, staff, and teachers to help a) educate, but b) help teach them how to build alliances, find and rely on community resources, and that create GSAs and QSAs and so forth. Where the Rivers Meet is, is by queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous folk, for queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous folk. And so, they do a lot of work in schools as well, and a lot of work on reserve and, and other communities, but they're intended to teach Indigenous youth about-- that Indigenous cultures in Canada and their history around gender and sexuality and, and how much more broadly it was understood before colonization and so forth. And with that, to be empowering, and teach self-advocacy as well. We also have a day shelter for queer and trans youth who are precariously housed or houseless. So otherwise, street involved, we do a lot, again, a lot of political lobbying, and activist work in that too. We are the-- the organization behind pride tape, if you've seen the hockey tape, and nohomophobes.com, and all those things. And then we do research as well looking at contemporary issues, impacting queer trans youth.

And so, we have a couple of professors who are aligned with us. And then we take on grads, graduate students, and practicum students, and so forth and do that work throughout the year. So that's where we are regarding the name, the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services. It's a long cumbersome name, and we call ourselves ISMSS, but also the language has changed. We don't talk about sexual minorities anymore. We talk about, you know, sexual and gender diversity, because we recognize that this idea of, you know, you know, if you look back to the, you know, to the 1950s, and you know, folks like Kinsey and others who were talking about the fact that we're all in this continuum of sexuality and gender. It just doesn't— doesn't fit anymore. So, we're currently in the process of rebranding and reimagining, you know, now that we've done some new strategic development and that sort of thing and trying to find a name that will stick with us for the long term.

Tara: Fantastic. What's so interesting in what you've just shared with us is these connections between the university and the community you don't often see that kind of a partnership. So, is there an office at the University of Alberta? And does that office serve as headquarters for all of these? Do you have a community location as well? How do you combine your community work and your research work?

Glynnis: Great question. So, we started off very campus centric, as often happens. But the work that we were doing, again was, so it was very much based on children and youth experiences in school, right, so we started spending more and more time in school, we have an— an office on campus, and we had, we were sharing some space with students, psychological services, and that on campus, until I came on board about two and a half years ago. And so, at that point, we're primarily working on campus. And then we had a very small closet size, you know, ironically, closet-sized office in this building downtown, where we did, people could stop in for STI testing, emergency, you know, food, mitts, that sort of thing, some of the youth that we were serving in, we managed to broker a deal with the landlord of that building downtown, about a year and a half ago, and— and were able to get a really good deal on some, you know, storefront kind of street front space to open an actual day shelter that we're working to turn into a 24/7 emergency shelter. But that allowed us to provide a lot more services to folks to access a lot of youth who were nervous to come on campus. And to just provide space for people to collect and for service providers to come and— and meet up with youth and so forth. So that's been a tremendous achievement. But it's, it was part of really intentionally changing how we saw ourselves and how others saw us because ISMSS was very much seen as kind of an academic high-level organization just because of its affiliation with the university. And so other community serving 2SLGBTQ orgs kind of saw, you know, it as being over there. And then here, you know, and, and so we worked very much to build community relationships, and the idea that we serve the community, we're involved in the community, and that too, so we started spending a lot more time outside of campus as well. Collaborating with a lot more organizations, sharing our resources a lot more, we've now created a community advisory committee, that we run all our, you know, programming priorities, and that by, because our, you know, our intention, very much was not to be, you know, exclusionary or isolationist and, and we didn't want to end up being, you know, a high level academic think tank that, that is filled with people who— who have not been immersed in the world outside of academia, right, we wanted to make sure we are really are— that our programs are informed by research, that we are conducting good quality research in and

reporting back on the things that we do, and that we're providing valuable information that and research that people can, that people can apply and use to model in their own services and other places.

Tara: That's so exciting. So, could you give us an example of a project that connects research and community work? The idea that somebody's research would have particular relevance for a community or perhaps a community looking for research to help them do what they do better?

Glynnis: Absolutely. And that we, we've done so much of, so much of that work, but recently, we have really paid attention to health outcomes for queer trans folk. And, you know, we've been focused on educational outcomes for a long time and still are. But now that we found— and this is, again, and we've seen this and this has been reflected in research across the country, that to the average age of contact for people seeking supports and Information Services is going down, meaning that children are younger when they're first getting in contact with us, when the institute first started operating the majority of requests for information about gender, sexuality, transitioning and that from family, from, from educators that would come around that junior high age, you know, late grade school, early, junior high, and now we're seeing that age, we're getting so many more requests for educators and families and individuals who are in elementary school, you know, in grades 3, 4, 5, and that too. So, and with that, the conversation about you know— about health supports and services and how to people access, you know, affirming care, and that, so. So, we have one of our graduate students has been looking at health outcomes for particularly transfemme people and their experiences with seeking care in general. And we have been using that work and also other research that's been done around health outcomes. And, and through what the information we've gleaned from that we ended up partnering with, with a group who were visioning a wraparound health, like LGBTQ wellness, a— a service, right, so a one stop shop for health services. And that too, so it's missing, it ended up partnering with these groups, this group of medical professionals and another and they brought some other folks on board. And in July of last year, we opened the LGBTQ Wellness Center here in Edmonton. And so now, ISMSS provides our psychological services on site there, plus a couple of other physical locations around town to make them more accessible. But— But what we've, what we've done there is, is create this center that allows people to get everything from, you know, family doctor, gynecology, to hair removal services, to psychological services to psychiatry, there's a pharmacy on site, and it's all there, it's all in a place that is, you know, that is very affirming. Everybody working there, is well versed in and or identifies as a member of 2SLGBTQ+ community. And so, and so people don't feel afraid to even go, don't, you know, that sort of thing, because that's what we're dealing with, especially with a lot of the youth that we work with, they were so afraid to, you know, to even seek services and support. So, we've tried to overcome that. So that's something that we are truly excited about. We're working collectively with the group that, that set this up, and we're continuing to do research on outcomes and people who seek those services. And that too, so and that's just, again, one of a multitude of examples of things that we've done recently.

Tara: So, what you're able to do is actually provide research on outcomes of what a model of one stop shopping looks like, what happens when people have access to affirming care. And I think that that's extremely exciting. And it's very rare to see a research center being so involved with community, community priorities. And I guess would you say the history of the Center beginning with something so

community oriented, like Camp Firefly, was that kind of connected to the trajectory that that the center has taken all these years later?

Glynnis: I think so, you know, it was because the youth that, the youth that we served in Camp Firefly, still do, really shaped how we focused on, you know, and what we learned about their experiences, right, so many of the— so many folks who came to us, as you know, as adolescents, you know, for the first camps are still involved as camp leaders, as other volunteers or have done research, you know, or even work for us, you know, and that, so we've tried to really keep that youth focus and, and let them lead us. We have, we create youth advisory committees for everything that we do on campus, a Youth Advisory Committee, and so forth. And that too, but we've let them lead us to what they need and what they're telling us. Because we know nothing happens in a vacuum, right? Like your educational experience is not separated from your family experience, from your healthcare experience, so forth. And these things impact each other. And so if you have somebody who's coming to campus telling us that they, that they cannot access health care, access health care, or they're afraid to go to school, or they're struggling within their family dynamic— we've created, so we created our Family Resiliency project, because of what we were hearing from, from these kids, what they really needed, the help they needed, you know, being able to have supported constructive conversations with family, to educate their family, we created our day shelter from, you know, the folks who are talking about, you know, the fact that, you know, they, they didn't always have a safe place to be, you know, that camp was the one time of year that they had, you know, four days where they could safely be somewhere and be themselves, you know, the other services that we've you know, that we've created Firefly in Schools was created from, you know, advice from these— these kids saying that we need, you know, our teachers to hear this and that too. So, you know, so it's, so everything links together and— and as long as we listen to what the young folks are telling us they need, I think we'll stay on the right track. You know?

Tara: It's so exciting to see— you know, we always are asked, what difference does your research make? Right? And it's so exciting to hear about how the Institute has really been able to take findings from different projects and then actually engage in action to make them better. Could you talk a little bit about funding? Is it the institute that takes a lead on looking for funding, for example, for the day shelter and the 24-hour shelter? Or is the institute really about the research and then facilitating action?

Glynnis: Oh, no, we find, we have to find our money. So yeah, we spend a lot of time looking for money, we get assistance from fund development within the Faculty of Education when it comes to donors, but for grants and that, we are finding our own money and finding creative ways to fund ourselves. When our, like, our day shelter opened, and I think about six days later, the provincial government cut our funding. And we had to, I mean, our— my shelter, my outreach coordinator, ended up creating a GoFundMe, you know, some of, some other volunteers created another fundraiser, we had restaurants who were raising money for us, you know, we had, we had to find money any way that we could to keep our services going. And we had a great deal of community support, which is great, but, you know, we're, we're charged with finding our money, like I said, other than individual donors, and that, that the university has forged relationships with who might say that this is where they want their dollars to go.

When it comes to grant funding and that, it's, it's up to us and that so, and so that's, you know, and as Executive Director, that's that my role is to find the money, you know.

Tara: That's a big role. That's a big role. As we begin to close up at the interview, Glynnis, I'd like you to talk about the future, where would you like to see— where the youth that work with you— like to see the institute go next?

Glynnis: Great question. I think, you know, this is bigger than us. This started really took off in about 2018, with the cancellation of Pride festival here, and you know, that there was, you know, there were similar events in Toronto and other cities, too, with a pushback from the folks in the queer trans community who felt like, you know, historically they've shouldered so much of the movement and just not been recognized and, and that we still, and I say collectively, "we", because we as an institution, but we as the 2SLGBTQ community, and that we're not doing a good job of including all members. And that includes, you know, folks who, you know, are non-white, it includes folks who are gender diverse, includes folks who have, who are differently abled, because ableism is huge in the queer community, huge, you know that. And that, so. So, what we've been, what we've been doing here, over the last year and a half or so, is working with other 2SLGBTQ serving organizations, to, to figure out what we need to do to truly remove barriers, and for people to participate in our services, to be represented by our services, to be seen, to have leadership roles and the movement here. And so that's where our focus is now: our focus is about, you know, how do we actually increase equity within our institute and you know, so we've, we've already done a lot of training and work led by members of the QTBIPOC community, we've done things like change our hiring practices within the institute. So, we now value life experience on weight with education. We, you know, we've looked at, again, providing our services and other, in other places, we've looked at, we have knowledge keepers who are advising us, and that too, on how we provide services, how we interact with the general community, and that and— and our Youth Advisory Committee, and our community advisory committee. So— so that's really a push for me personally and for the institute is to, is to really try to get rid of the systemic inequities that, that we've helped perpetuate for as long as we've been around.

Tara: It's an exciting project, an exciting project that is really responding to our political moment. And speaking of political moments, I read somewhere that you are politically involved and that you're actually thinking of running for a position on Edmonton City Council in 2021. Can you tell us a little bit about that and how being involved politically in municipal politics is important to your work at ISMSS?

Glynnis: Absolutely. And that, you know, I have officially announced that I'm running for city council here this year. I had consulted with my executive committee and the Dean of Education prior because my condition, if I was— when, when I was approached to run, I took some time because I, I love what I'm doing with ISMSS, I love the ability to really make change and have, and have the freedom and the support to do so however we see fit. So, I thought about it. And I thought about what I could do from a municipal level, again, representing the queer community on council. And having, you know, first-hand knowledge of, of folks who haven't historically been heard enough, when it comes to politics and political decisions. And so, I think this is a great opportunity, my condition of running was that I didn't

have to give up ISMSS fully, I will still continue to be tied, you know, connected to ISMSS and keep doing our work and to be informed by the community I serve, the queer and trans community and youth. And that too, around the decisions that I make and what I propose, but where I see municipal politics really playing a role is, I mean, when it comes, when it comes to setting a tone about abolishing discrimination and inequity of by, you know, through the, through bylaws, through what businesses you issue business licenses from, for or don't, you know, we recently passed a broad ban on conversion therapy here. And I was part of testifying for that. And people thought, said, you know, what can you do at municipal level? I said, well, you know, we can refuse to issue business licenses to businesses who engage in practices that we think, you know, that— that meet the definition of conversion therapy, right. Now, there are things that we can do, but also, so many of our community members are impacted by unemployment, underemployment, houselessness, discrimination, being, you know, disproportionately carded, you know, targeted by law enforcement, and that, and through the municipal government, you know, we have a direct line on these things on— on homelessness, on law enforcement, on rethinking how we respond to people who need extra supports. And so, if I can get elected on the city council, use my 20 years plus of working with, you know, working in social services, the knowledge that, that I've gained, through working with our community being a member of it to, to enforce some changes that are going to make life easier for the 2SLGBTQ community. And that then, you know, that's, that's my calling, I'm going to do it.

Tara: This is so exciting Glynnis, you have given us a model of community engaged research that is extremely innovative and flexible and forward looking. And you've linked it to the important work in municipal politics. And we just want to wish you all the best in the next steps because you have, exactly as you said, so much experience, so much knowledge, so much access to youth advisory councils, to help inform the work of, of, of the city. And I think that makes such great sense as the next step for you and for ISMSS. So we want to wish you all the best. So, Glynnis Lieb, thank you so much for joining us today and talking about ISMSS and its current work. Glynnis Lieb is the executive director of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the Faculty of Education University of Alberta. Stay tuned for their new name soon. Glynnis has worked for both government and not for profit social services organizations. She's also a post-secondary instructor and has held several sessional positions in five different institutions in Manitoba and Alberta over the past 14 years. As we have seen, Glynnis believes strongly in community involvement in social activism. She sits on a number of boards for entities that are health or social justice focused. Finally, as we heard, Glynnis is very politically involved and is running for a position on the Edmonton City Council in 2021. Glynnis, we wish you all the best in your political race. All right. That's our podcast for today. You can find this podcast at [www.LGBTQfamiliespeakout.ca](http://www.LGBTQfamiliespeakout.ca) This episode was produced with the support of the New College Initiative Fund and from Doug Freisen, who is a PhD student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Thanks to LGBTQ families speak out team member Kate Reid, sound engineer Lisa Patterson, and musician Doug Friesen for creating the music that opens and closes the show. I'm Tara Goldstein. All the best.