



Ballroom, We Care

Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth in Ballroom

What is Ballroom?

Ballroom is a community of people across the LGBTQ+ spectrum who form alternative family structures and compete in highly structured competitions known as "balls." They also fight injustice and advocate on a wide range of community issues, including the murders of trans people, police killings, discriminatory laws, and systemic racism.

Known as "Houses" in ballroom culture, the families are oftentimes named after some of the world's most recognized fashion labels and designers. Following this dual framework of brands and families, ballroom houses include familial roles such as a Mother and a Father who typically oversee the day-to-day operations of the house. They also participate in the extravagant ballroom events where the houses compete. Balls include several creative categories where members compete for trophies and cash prizes, as well as recognition within the community.

What is Ballroom?

- The Ballroom Community originated in Harlem in the 1920s with Black and Latinx LGBTQ+ youth and young adults under 30, in which people "walk" (compete) for trophies, prizes, and glory at events known as balls.
- Ball culture is about community. It's about "chosen" family and it's centered around the LGBTQ black and brown people who very often are rejected by their families and society.
- The Ballroom Community serves at-risk LGBTQ+ populations, such as those dealing with substance use, HIV/AIDS, childhood trauma, hatred, violence, and homelessness.
- Ballroom Community fosters healthy relationships and belonging, due to marginalization and other risk factors it also has a higher prevalence of some high-risk behaviors such as substance use.

Ballroom, We Care

Mission: *Ballroom, We Care* exists to reduce the incidence and prevalence of crystal methamphetamine use by raising awareness, promoting education, enacting environmental strategies, as well as providing linkages to support and resources for LGBTQ+ youth in the Ballroom Community.

Ballroom, We Care

- BWC was formed in the spring of 2018 as a direct response to the Crystal Meth epidemic that was happening within the ballroom community in NYC.
- BWC first goal was to create a safe spaces to foster dialogue and open communication with the community members about Crystal Meth and the effects it was having on the LGBTQ youth of color in ballroom.
- In April of 2019 BWC introduces itself by holding it first community forum.

“I am not a “high risk” person; I am a member of a community that has been put at high risk.”

-Marcela Romero, Coordinator of REDLACTRANS

What LGBTQ+ Youth of Color are Facing:

- **Multiple oppressions**
 - Poverty, Racism, HIV/AIDS related issues and/or other concerns
- **Lack of social spaces**
 - Reliance on LGBT bar scene for socialization and identity affirmation
- **Disconnection from family and other institutions**
 - Family, religious and social intolerance of LGBT identities
- **Violence**
 - The threat and/or experience of anti-gay or anti-trans violence
- **LGBT-related stigma**
 - Discrimination in housing, education, employment, health care access...

- **40%** of the homeless youth population in NYC are LGBTQ (**1,600 youth**). These homeless youth are more likely to experience violence or trauma, leading to mental health difficulties. Some turn to sex work/ survival sex to survive.
- LGBT youth are **190%** more likely to abuse substances than non-LGBT identified youth and LGBT youth in NYC are **10x** as likely to use meth as their heterosexual peers
- **68%** of LGBTQ youth reported symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder while **55%** of LGBTQ youth reported symptoms of major depressive disorder.

Even prior to the pandemic, LGBTQ youth have been found to be at significant increased risk for depression, anxiety, substance use, and suicidality (Russell & Fish, 2016). These risks are even more pronounced among youth who are transgender and/or nonbinary (Price-Feeney, Green, Dorison, 2020). Thus, LGBTQ youth may be particularly vulnerable to negative mental health impacts associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

**The Trevor Project: Implications of COVID-19 for
LGBTQ Youth Mental Health and Suicide
Prevention Report**

Pandemic stressors

- The challenge of seeking employment and loss of employment due the pandemic has caused LGBTQ+ youth to experience other disparities include housing and food instabilities. Due to the limitations or gaps in LGBTQ+ services of addressing all of the needs of our youth, youth have been reporting longer wait times to receive affirming services or having to navigate services at agencies or organizations that might not feel as affirming or safe.
- In terms of housing, there are not enough isolation beds for youth of TGNC experience, they cannot find affirming housing options and lastly, many LGBTQ+ affirming emergency housing options currently has long waiting list and limited services
- An unintended consequence of social distancing is the loss of social connections and support systems. Ballroom is a social community. Social distancing have displace may youth who found safety and support with in Ballroom.
- The Trauma and stress of navigating different systems in a global pandemic.

The pandemic has highlighted the need for trauma-informed mental health services, but often the mental health services may not be culturally responsive or sensitive to LGBTQ+ issues

- There has been an increase in mental health emergencies over the past year. Young people have reported higher levels of stress, depression and anxiety since the pandemic began.
- 68% of LGBTQ youth reported symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder while 55% of LGBTQ youth reported symptoms of major depressive disorder. Youth are also reporting the lack of affirming mental health services that they can access. 46% of LGBTQ youth report they wanted psychological or emotional counseling from a mental health professional but were unable to receive it in the past 12 months, Trevor Project.
- BWC has seen a 35% increase in direct service referral since the beginning of the pandemic, with a large number of youth reaching out for recovery services and mental health support.

BWC Creating Protective Factors

For LGBTQ+ Youth of Color in Ballroom

Trainings/ Education:

Crystal Meth 101 training:

Youth training

Young Adults training

Community training

Toolkit/ Recourse Guide:

Provides resources information about Crystal Meth, Mental Health and Substance misuse supports

Call and response:

Events/ Forums:

Forums

BWC COVID and Ballroom Forum

COVID Vaccine and the Ballroom Community Forum

Events

Meth & Ballroom virtual event
event

Trans Community virtual

Community Outreach/ Networking:

Networking

- ❖ *Community Advisory Board (CAB) Meeting*

Media

- ❖ New Website
- ❖ Social media campaign/ Unified Messaging
- ❖ Utilizing Media platforms

Sponsorship

- ❖ S.T.A.R. HBD Marsha Event
- ❖ Register your Vote Ball
- ❖ Bloody Ballet Mini Ball
- ❖ BIGO Live Virtual Ball

Direct Service/ Grants:

Youth Covid19 impact Grant

\$500 given to 10 youth

The grant went towards Medication, Food, Housing and other needs.

Intakes and Resource support

New intake form online

11 intakes

17 referrals

Community Check-In/Peer Support Group

One on One support from License Mental Health personal

Safe space to find community support and resources

BWC Youth

Component:

BWC Youth Council

Youth Council Board Outline Summary

- 10 young people/ young adults
- 16-25yr
- 1 member per house
- Prioritizing BIPOC Trans and Non-Binary folks
- \$30 per person/meeting

Goals

- Attend trainings and workshops to better support the LGBTQ+ youth in Ballroom
- Brainstorm ways to change policies and practices so that LGBTQ youth can have affirming support & resources
- Plan BWC youth events/ functions to create a safe involvement for LGBT Youth
- Outreach at Ballroom event to promote BWC mission
- Developed workshops and trainings to educate other youth in Ballroom
- Create Youth Council Specific, Messaging, Visuals, Branding, Social Media about mental health and substance misuse

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Questions