**Magic Mountie Vault: The Pride Center 2018**

**Episode 114**

Christina Barsi:

Hi, welcome back to the Magic Mountie Podcast, this is Christina. And today we have a special episode we wanted to release from the summer series of 2018 when we visited the Pride Center for the very first time. In an upcoming episode, we'll be catching up once again with Melinda Bowen, the coordinator of the Pride Center to get an update on its evolution as well as what we need to know to also keep evolving. So until then, please enjoy this episode from the Magic Mountie vault.

Melinda Bowen:

I know I'm 55 years old, I'm a lesbian, I should be fully aware in the community and I'm still learning about gender identity and fluidity and trans stints, and it wasn't something that was part of my own community growing up. And so, I think the Pride Center can really help bring awareness to some of the obstacles that our students have.

Liesel Reinhart:

Hey, you've got Liesel Reinhart and-

Christina Barsi:

Christina Barsi.

Liesel Reinhart:

... in the house and today's episode is a really fun visit we did with the Mt. SAC Pride Center. One of only we believe three campus LGBT++ pride centers on campuses in community colleges nationwide. Is that right?

Christina Barsi:

Yeah. I think Maureen was saying it was two, it's one of two community colleges.

Liesel Reinhart:

Pretty special. Well, we'll find out about this special program, meet some of the students and talk to it's really incredible advisor. So stay tuned.

Speaker 1:

I would like faculty to know that using proper pronouns, proper names and things like that are really important, not just the names that are listed on the sheet on the first day of roll, but a student names that are chosen. Those are really important.

Liesel Reinhart:

And what about helping students find the center? Is there something else faculty can do to help let students know that you're here?

Speaker 1:

I think maybe just make it a little bit more aware as far as our resources, in the back of our agendas we have the resources for the writing center for the language lab, stuff like that. Maybe the Pride Center could become a resource that's on the back of the agenda or just advisors letting students know everywhere that we're here. We have a big gay flag on the door, it's hard to miss us.

Melinda Bowen:

I'm Melinda Bowen and I'm the coordinator of the pride center. And it's just a really fantastic space. And I got involved, I applied for the position through academic Senate and I was just so excited to see that there was that opportunity and it seemed like just a perfect fit for me and everything and the journey that I've been on in my life. It's complicated with our community and that's the challenge and the beauty at the same time. So our students first and foremost need a safe space to just be as human beings. And I think there might a couple other equity programs on campus that also struggle with that. So, first and foremost, we got to get the folks in through the door and they have to trust us and they have to have a space where they can be safe.

Melinda Bowen:

The things that we offer in the center, computers, printers. We have a librarian that comes in on Wednesday. We have a therapist that comes in on Tuesday and academic counselor on Tuesday mornings. We have several professors who donate their time to help out with tutoring and research. And we have groups where the kids can talk about, for instance, one of the topics for groups was coming out to your family and how to be prepared for that. Especially if you're outed to have an outed preparedness plan, so to speak. These are things that other students don't necessarily have to have on their minds. And our students do. We have students who get kicked out of the home once the parents discover they're gay or transgender part of the LGBT community. And so there's a lot of crisis management in our center and at the same time to blend that crisis management into a space that students can thrive as well, even the student in crisis. So we have a great safety net there.

Speaker 2:

I've been here for a long time. So I've been here since the place first opened. When I first came in here, we opened the center and they gave the space to us. And then as the months went on and things started progressing it's been a really big impact. A lot of people don't know about it too much about the Pride Center. They do now, but before there was a lot of people in the community that go here that wanted a safe space, so it's impacted a lot of people. And so we get a lot of allies that come in here, we get a lot of obviously people in the community that come here. So, it's interesting, it has impacted a lot of lives.

Isabel:

My name is Isabel. I am an ally to the community. Majority of my friends are part of the community, so when they're hey, come check this out, this is a cool hangout spot. I started coming in, I was very shy at first because I didn't know anybody as well, but just gradually sitting here and just listening to people's conversations and putting in my 2 cents, I was able to make friends with everybody. So yeah.

Liesel Reinhart:

Have you figured out what any tips are for other people who are allies?

Isabel:

I feel like the most important rule for me right now is just to make yourself known that you're an ally or an advocate because they're both two very different things. And I always say that, I am an ally not an advocate. So sometimes it's also my comfortability, how comfortable am I to go as far as I can for somebody that I love and care about. I feel that's just the main thing for somebody, but also just don't classify somebody in one specific way, because you never know now the days, you never know if by you just saying, him or they could offend somebody. So, just keep an open mind and just listen.

Melinda Bowen:

It's a fun place. It really is. We have study hours and then we have happy hours and then we have social hours. So it's not just a clubhouse that kids come in and just hang out. There are times where we're really helping them be academically successful. And other times where there were just having a space where they can chit chat, and then there are other times we're actually doing events. So we've had a coming out party and open house in the fall. We had a Harvey Milk and cookies day where we showed the Harvey Milk movie and then had guided discussions by a psychologist afterwards. So, the kids could talk about. Most of the students didn't know who Harvey Milk was, and so they got to see a little bit of the history behind the LGBT community and coming out and pride and also work through some of their feelings about what it means to come out what it means to have to be in the closet, to be judged and persecuted and all of those things.

Melinda Bowen:

These students are on the edge often of some pretty serious, pretty deep stuff. They're just one step away from a very serious conversation at any given moment with their family, with their friends, with their professors. One of the things that we're going to be doing in the fall hopefully influx day, will be providing professors here on campus with the toolkit. An example of one of the devices in the toolkit will be a letter that can go out to the students before the semester begins, asking how they identify gender wise, and do they utilize their real name? So, what does that look like? My, birth name is Melinda, but maybe I identify as a male and I go by the name Stephen. So Melinda's name gets called first day of roll, but Steven sitting in the desk and the student is outed right away. And so these are problems and obstacles that other students don't necessarily have, and they can have deep consequences. I've had students drop their classes from a very similar scenario.

Speaker 3:

I started coming actively this semester and it's been really important, it's been a place where I could find a lot of chosen family, not just blood and people that I really care about that share experiences. So, it's been a really good, safe space to have for all the students on campus. This has become a really, really good space for everybody because we have the food pantry for students that maybe can't afford food or anything like that. We have resources here available. We have advisors, we have therapists. If I didn't have that, I feel like it would be a very different college experience for me. And in general, I may not be a successful college student. I may not enjoy the campus as much.

Liesel Reinhart:

How did you find this place?

Speaker 4:

It was pretty obvious. I just saw the rainbow flag. I was "cool, my people."

KJ:

I'm KJ. And one of the many members of our little community here at the Pride Center at Mt. SAC, we're just one of the few places that happen to really be that safe space for people who may not feel too comfortable in certain settings, with the writing center, the library or the cafe, and here we're able to provide some food assistance, being able to print out your pictures, references to groups that may be outside of our limit here at Mt. SAC, that could be within the surrounding communities, over in the LA area, the IE, Long Beach, Orange County, as well as some other remote parts, like with myself, I'm from up the hill. We don't have very many community outreach up there, so I'm able to receive that from within the surrounding areas of here.

KJ:

We have a few teachers on campus that act as people that look over the center who provide references, share insight and stories. We provide a study hour twice a day on Mondays and Wednesdays and then group sessions or group presentations on Tuesdays and Thursdays to be able to discuss certain matters that may be particular to the center, or as well as likewise manners, but on all it's more for people who might be considering certain things about themselves, whether they're trans or if they're a straight person that wants to be a little more social and get that social experience of understanding what is asexual, what is transsexual, what it means to be bisexual and how it is you get to choose whoever you want when you're attracted to both, there's Pansexuality, it's really opening itself up to the diversity within the community of the LGBTQ+ .

KJ:

So, that's what I'd have to say. And for almost the whole year I've been here in the center, I haven't had an issue with anyone. It's a really fine kosher space where one is able to accept and being able to be in. So, and usually if there is a problem it's disputed right then and there very good. And then we co-exist with the club Lambda as well. Lambda is an outreach program for the LGBT++ the straight alliance. If it was a high school club straight into the gay lines club and those go into matters of being able to help students find out more about themselves being able to outreach.

KJ:

And that is how we actually got the Pride Center was through the effort of Lambda being able to advocate for so many years. And we're on a current project now to being able to have bathroom rights and being able to allow people who would prefer a certain restroom rather than having to go to the one that people would think that they should go in. And other than that though, it's a fun group. Just being able to like make friends with everyone. I've made all my friends through the pride center, as well as Lambda. And it's been a positive experience ever since.

Melinda Bowen:

I think lot of folks my age and maybe older, we don't have an awareness of what these young folks are bringing forth and what's seeking to emerge in the LGBTQ community. And I will say it's absolutely beautiful and has blown my life wide open in such a beautiful way. I know as a young lesbian, when I was in college, I had a girlfriend and other members of my team had girlfriends, none of us talked to each other. Isn't that interesting? And so we were probably juniors or seniors before we all started hanging out together because we were afraid, when I first started teaching, I was in the closet. I had a picture of myself sitting on one of my best friends laps, a guy to make it look I was straight because I would be fired if they knew.

Melinda Bowen:

And in fact, one of my schools got wind that I was a lesbian and the principal told my best friend at the school, hey, tell Melinda, she needs to look for another job they're coming for her. That was in 1991. And so shortly thereafter, I came out for good. That was just not acceptable, but I did switch schools and find a place that was a little more open. Even in my coaching with the women's soccer program, which I have coached women's soccer at the college level for almost 30 years. Just being a mentor and being a bridge from one side to the other is something that I've found really important in my life. In this case with soccer I was a solid Woodbridge, I knew, in this case I'm more like one of those rope bridges.

Melinda Bowen:

We're all on this very wavy road together, and so I think in some ways for me, as I'm in that beautiful career in education, in some ways it's letting me up in a really beautiful way as well. So, certainly anything that I've given to kids in the pride center this year has been quadrupled and what they've given me so, it's pretty special. On one hand, the community wants to be accepted and wants to be woven into the rest of society, there's a very big push. And on the other hand, we want to also have our identity and the reason this topic came up in the pride center today was that pride has changed a lot in the last few years, especially with marriage equality, that was something that we were always fighting for in the movement.

Melinda Bowen:

And now we're not sure what we're fighting for. And so, I think what I want faculty to know is that these students, their lives are exciting, scary, and complicated, and they don't have it all figured out yet, and their coordinator doesn't either. And so I think just to really have an open mind, just pronouns alone can be really challenging, trying to understand what pronoun to use for a human being. I know for a lot of faculty members, co faculty members, I get a lot of questions about that. And so I think we all just need to be patient and look at that student in the eyes and just recognize that there's this beautiful human being evolving in front of us. And if we just keep our eyes lit on their eyes, we'll find out that we get to evolve, too. And that's pretty.

Christina Barsi:

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