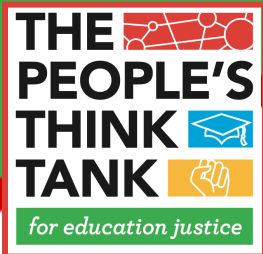


Liberation is Intersectional: Following the Leadership of Trans Youth of Color



By J. Gia Loving
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For transgender and non-binary youth in the United States, life can be dangerous and feel isolating. Young people who transcend gender norms often face family rejection, violence, and harassment - all because of who they are. I'm all too familiar with this reality and the risk that comes with reclaiming agency over my existence as a trans Latina; when in public, my body loses its humanity as strangers use me for the punchline of their jokes and pent-up emotions. I've spent much of my life learning to move a little faster when others raise their voice at me. Generation after generation, trans people endure much in order to survive and in the words of Miss Major, a community mother, "we're still f***** here." As an organizer and youth mentor, it's been a journey learning to use my own voice to advocate, with love, against

racialized, gendered violence and to keep moving toward liberation.

Organizing for Survival and Change

For as long as I can remember, I've tried to make the world around me a safer place for those who come after me. As a young person, my family and I experienced the violence of poverty and homelessness. We shuffled from one motel to another for six years, around the time I was in middle and high school. It was during this time that I came out as queer and started to explore my identity as a trans girl. Although my family accepted me with open hearts, I needed to feel a sense of community with other queer youth at school. My older sister had once talked about the club for queer students her friend started, but when I finally got to high school, there was no such thing. That's



when I decided to start a GSA club and reached out to GSA Network for help getting this past my high school's unsupportive administration.

As a poor, young queer person, I really utilized the youth programming opportunities at GSA Network as both a knowledge builder, but also a survival tactic. It allowed me to explore my identity, but also provided the kind of support that helped me stay alive and navigate toward basic-needs stability. It transformed my life; the space, tools, and knowledge that GSA's activist camps provided all still inform my advocacy work today. The work that I was doing to start a GSA club was *organizing*. I was organizing to shape change on campus and shift its culture. GSA Network's commitment to youth-rooted leadership helped me connect the work I was doing to survive to a broader movement connected with many, many people like myself.

Centering this perspective and honoring the value of youth leadership programs to my life, I take my ever-changing role in this process seriously. Where I once felt the urgency of finding community for myself, I now feel the responsibility of supporting younger people in making those connections. Luckily, I've had the opportunity to do so as part of the GSA Network staff in the years since graduating high school, focused on making our programming as intentional and holistically-supportive as possible.

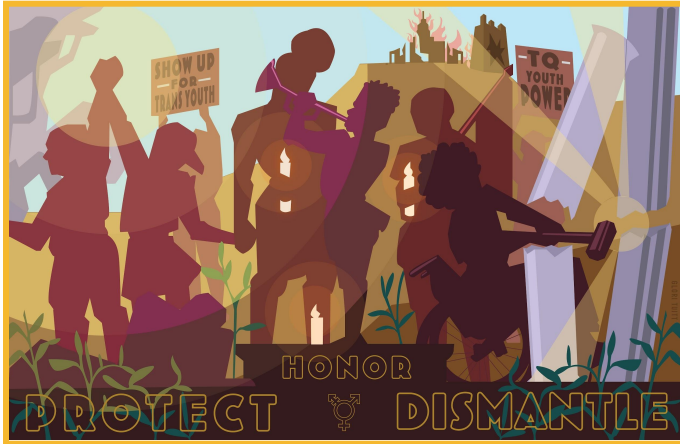
TRUTH's Nine Point Platform for Trans Liberation

Under capitalist pressures, queer and trans organizing spaces didn't always allow folks to show up as their full authentic selves, whether that was being real about their financial struggles at home or being real about whether they have a safe place to call in from. As community groups grow their resource network, the opportunities they offer must also evolve. Our commitment to liberation must mean making sure that the programming we offer speaks to the unique experiences of young trans folks and invites them to show up as they authentically are.



As we deepened our support of trans youth programming, the trans and non-binary youth leaders in the program developed their own path forward, the [National Trans Youth \(TRUTH\) Council Nine-Point Platform](#). The *Nine-Point Platform* was conceived from youth council conversations about what trans liberation looked like for the different young people around the table. The question quickly became: *how do we imagine a future that really works for everyone?* They were figuring out how they, as trans youth, could remind broader communities that if we're going to be liberated from oppression one day, the plan to get there needs to be intersectional. Any liberatory agenda would need to consider all the issues faced by young trans people, but at the time, no one was asking us about this.

The youth were inspired by the Black Panthers' Ten-Point Program, the Young Lords' Twelve-Point Program, and the platform of the Third World Gay Revolution. These historical manifestos created an air of excitement for our youth. They felt like they were honoring their ancestors and all the manifestos that have come before them, as well as actually documenting their own vision... saying, *this*, as young trans people, is what we think liberation looks like.



The result of those conversations became this platform in which they listed out nine intersecting issues that they felt should be centered, including decolonization; educational, environmental, and transformative justice; an end to global white supremacy; and for self-determination for all people. Each year following the adoption of the platform, we highlight one of the nine points through political education and days of action. In 2020, programming centered around abolition and calling for the removal of police officers from school campuses. When the young people published the platform in 2018, we wondered if the statement would be perceived as too radical. “Ooh, we’re calling for abolition of police, ICE, and detentions, that’s maybe going too far.” Maybe, it was a little out there at the time. In really honoring what our young people were leading, however, we supported them and published it. So two years later, when our program was focusing on abolition, it was affirming to see the national landscape for police-free schools shift and begin to align with abolitionist visions of our program participants. Today, many

school districts have cut their contracts with local police departments.

Before, it might have felt like a stretch to say gender justice *is*... racial justice... *and* economic justice... *and* disability justice... *and* so on. But now that young people have called it for themselves through the TRUTH Platform. If we’re really following the lead of young people, it makes sense now to bring gender into the conversation with all other issues.

Building Solidarity by Centering Trans Girls of Color and Addressing Anti-Black Racism

In the first few years of our trans youth programming, our retention of trans girls of color was low. Trans girls of color want to be part of the program and take up opportunities to lead. While girls and non-binary femmes were enthusiastic about connecting, they were often also the members most struggling with basic needs insecurity. They often need to hold extra jobs to make money and, as a result, they are not able to attend our meetings regularly or don’t have a consistent address for us to send resources or their stipend check to. A lot of the girls that we’re supporting are in the midst of being removed from their homes or having already left, living with friends or staying in relationships to maintain their housing.

Centering trans girls of color has required our programming to be adaptive and creative. Through our [Roses Initiative](#), we try to shape our programming to meet the needs of trans girls of color. We want to do so through an approach that is welcoming and not overwhelming. The goal is to maintain a supportive connection that can be consistent for youth leaders, without the expectations that they can show up beyond their capacity.

One issue that prevents true solidarity from forming is anti-Blackness. As trans young people in our programs began to work together, they uncovered differing ideas about what it meant to be young and trans; their perspectives were influenced

by many factors including economic and racial backgrounds. Those disagreements were realizations of, "Oh, that's not actually the same story. We share many things, but we have different stories." While some of these moments were quickly moved through, there were times these moments held up the group from moving forward. These conflicts weren't comfortable for folks in the room, but they were necessary. The young people speaking up were taking a risk, but it was the right direction for us to welcome conflict and find our way through it together, rather than avoiding the tension. As program staff, the challenge was to show how community circles could validate individual experiences, while also interrupting patterns of oppression from repeating. We were struggling with how to gather folks who shared a few identities, but all came with unique lived experiences.

It became clear that some non-Black participants were unaware of how they contributed to anti-Blackness, even when talking about "just" their experiences with gender. For example, it was not apparent to some white trans youth why removing police from schools was important to all students' safety, when in fact, *they* felt safer knowing police were close. It required much group struggle to explain the connection between police brutality and the targeting of Black and Brown trans people, and by the end of these conversations, the comfort Black participants may have entered with was impacted. Black and Brown youth leaders, nevertheless, spoke clear boundaries. "This can't happen again. We took this moment to share our knowledge of anti-Blackness. This cannot happen again if you want Black folks to come back."

We had to take a step back and talk through what it can look like to be participating in anti-Blackness, regardless of good intentions. Our commitment to keeping Black members at the

center of our politics led the charge to create change. In order to truly liberate ourselves, we need to do the work of building solidarity and addressing the issues facing all of our community.

Building Solidarity within the Trans Community

There's so much history of trans people being scapegoats and being left out of policy changes that has scarred relationships. Those moments of violence can easily be mirrored within the trans community between folks with more access and folks with less access. Oftentimes, trans youth are at the will or at the agency of their parents or their school administration.

There is immense potential in the solidarity between elder trans folks and younger trans folks that would provide a lot of power that currently doesn't exist. For a variety of reasons, socially and historically, trans people take care of trans people. There's a long tradition of young trans people finding older trans folks who act as mentors when their first family doesn't accept them. It can be transformational for young trans

folks to feel connected with older possibility models.

Building intergenerational solidarity within our movement is hard, but necessary. Trans elders moved mountains to literally survive as long as they have. The paths they moved through may look very different from survival now, sometimes conflicting with the experiences of young people today. This is merely the pattern of a changing world and evolving people. Our language, our dress, our ways of being have continued to transcend what was once possible. Yet if we do not care for our elders and listen to their stories, we stand to lose a great deal of wisdom and endurance. Our movement is made up of relationships, which can mean rough things when we're divided. But on the flip side, when we nurture relationships and solidarity... there is people power.





I really believe in the expertise of young people in their experiences and in movement building. I've had to take risks as a young trans person myself, to believe in myself as an organizer and as valuable part of the conversation. I can trace this back to starting my own GSA club and being the change I needed in the world... being my own fiercest ally and staying in community. More power is unleashed when we believe in and follow the leadership of young trans folks. ❖



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