

[ETSU SOWK Policy Podcast with Ivy Hill: Campaign for Southern Equality](#) [FULL PODCAST](#)

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): Hello and welcome to the Social Work policy podcast brought to you from East Tennessee State University's College of Clinical, Rehabilitative and Health Sciences Department of Social Work. Rehabilitative and Health Sciences Department of Social Work. I'm Whitney Rosenblatt. She and her pronouns MSW Class of 2023. Today we have Ivy Hill. They them pronouns with us to discuss how policy practice impacts LGBTQ folks, both here in the South as well as across the United States.

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): Before we really dive into anything, I wonder if you would be willing to explain a little bit about campaign for Southern Equality where you currently work and what their mission and goals are around you to do support and advocacy?

Ivy Hill: Yeah. So, I'm the Community Health Program director at the Campaign for Southern Equality, and we actually have a lot of different program areas. But all of them work together, and our mission is to create environments where LGBTQ folks in the South are able to have full legal and lived equality. And so, there's a lot of different ways that we do that, we have the Southern Equality Fund program where we're doing a mix of emergency assistance grants since the onset of COVID for LGBTQ folks in the South. And then we also do like grants for folks who are on the ground providing direct services to LGBTQ folks. There's a few different buckets of work. We maintain the trans in the south guide that is trans friendly directory of medical providers and legal service providers that covers 13 southern states. And if somebody is listening to this, who's a trans friendly provider, you can go online and add yourselves. And we just do a little bit of vetting before we add the providers into the guide itself. We also do pop up clinics. We do policy advocacy work. A lot of my focus is in South Carolina, which is where I'm based and so we formed a coalition called South Carolina United for Justice and Equality, and that is the group of us that do a lot of that policy advocacy work. You know, we also have healing and resilience program where we teach folks about semantics and ways to avoid burnout in the work and to take care of yourself. We have our program that's really awesome, called the Southern Equality Studios that looks at how we can use art as tools for resistance. And there's a lot of other stuff that we do. I can go on and on. But yeah, those are some of our main program areas.

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): Thank you so much for sharing all of that, and I will just say that I personally have gone to the queer artist meet ups and I'm a huge proponent of the studios and I think it's just an amazing program and that's just one of several things that I've seen in just the Asheville community alone that has made a really big difference in the lives of the queer community that I belong to here in western North Carolina. So I want to thank you and campaign for southern equality, for the opportunities that you have already been providing for folks in this area. I wonder if you can talk a little bit more about specifically the barriers and discrimination that LGBTQ folks face in the workplace and in schools and our communities, and

why it's important for not only these programs, but also advocacy efforts to be geared towards this population?

Ivy Hill: Yeah, absolutely. So, a lot of my work, so I'm transgender, and a lot of my work really focuses specifically on trans folks and the barriers that we face in accessing health care and also legislative policies and stuff. Like I mentioned, the South Carolina coalition a minute ago, and last session, there were six attempts to ban trans girls from playing sports in middle and high school, and we're seeing more already come down the pipeline and session just started last week. But just hearing, you know, folks who don't understand what it is to be trans or our humanity, talk about us in hearings or in the media and stuff like that also has a real negative impact specifically on trans youth. But trans folks in general and then in terms of like medical care and stuff we've done, we've got a research arm of Campaign for Southern Equality also.

Ivy Hill: So, there's a couple different things that we've done the LGBTQ Health Survey where we and there's a report published on our website where folks can go in and dive a little deeper into those results and stuff. But where we really take a look at the barriers that LGBT folks more broadly across the south face in trying to access health care. And then we also did a trans health focus group project where we traveled across the south and talked to trans folks about those barriers that we face in accessing health care. And then we take that research and that's kind of where it comes from, the research part of our program into my part of our program, and we take that research and those findings and try to build interventions for those things which have looked like direct service pop up clinics across the south. Prior to COVID, now we've been doing that more virtually and through like resource guides and emails and stuff like that. But hopefully at some point this pandemic we'll pass them, will be able to go back to in-person stuff.

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): You know, I wonder, too, like for the transitioning onto virtual platforms, how has that impacted the work that you do, not just with the pop-up clinics, but just programing and interventions in general?

Ivy Hill: Yeah, it's really difficult and so at my other job at gender benders, we're fixing to publish a research report about how COVID has impacted trans folks. And we know that LGBT folks, and then you know, compounded even more for transgender folks are already dealing with a lot of social isolation, lack of resources. You know, a lot of times in the South, when a kid comes out, they don't have, they lose support from their family, they lose support from churches that they may attend, they'll lose support from sports teams or stuff like that. So, all these things that create really strong support networks for youth and for people in general are harder to access for LGBT folks, but specifically for trans folks. So, folks are already dealing with increased social isolation. And then that's been compounded by COVID. And what work that we were able to do with creating in-person gatherings and safe spaces for people to get together has had to shift to virtual, which is better than nothing. But, you know, it's just not the same as being able to get together and share a meal and stuff like that.

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): It is absolutely not the same. I know in the work that I do, having virtual spaces just doesn't feel as authentic. I know a lot, especially since I work specifically with youth and young adults. particularly here in the South, that just makes things a lot more difficult. What does it look like for Campaign for Southern Equality in the work that you do? How does intersectionality play into the experiences of LGBTQ folks, particularly here in the South?

Ivy Hill: Yeah, well it's huge, it's intertwined in everything that we do. We have an equity team, actually have a meeting with our equity team later this afternoon, where we talk about race a lot, but also ability status and how we can make all of our programs and stuff more accessible for folks and just a lot of different intersections, from language barriers to disability to race and the thing is, with each one of these identities that a person holds their ability to connect with community, to access services where people treat them with dignity and respect compounds exponentially. And we've seen that again and again in our research. Like, if you're transgender and you're in the south, it's already two strikes against you in terms of being able to find like a medical provider who will treat you with dignity and respect, make you feel comfortable to go to the doctor. Which is why a lot of trans folks don't go to the doctor when we need to. But then if you're also a black or brown person, if you also speak Spanish, those things make it exponentially more difficult.

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): Absolutely, and that affects all aspects of life, right? And if you don't have access to get medical care, your ability to work may suffer, your ability to actively engage in your community suffers... socially, economically, even politically We know that these things really work against people and so that intersectionality is really important for everyone to be considering as we're talking not just about LGBTQ folks, but just, you know, different underrepresented populations in general.

Ivy Hill: Absolutely. The more of those that, we find that the more marginalized identities a person holds a higher rates of depression, there are higher rates of anxiety. And I think a lot of that is just because of that like how much harder it is to find community to find your people, to find the resources that you need.

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): And I think the work that you y'all are doing to provide resources around affirming practitioners is incredibly important. I know it's made such a big difference for the clients that I serve. I know from my youth that I work with that a lot of times they don't find clinicians, particularly social workers, or therapists, that are affirming. They don't even understand the basic language around being queer and trans. And even just like basic stuff that they're not getting support from their family, they're not getting support from their friends and then on top of that, they can't even find mental health providers that are affirming. And so, you know, kind of the question along with that is why is it important, particularly for social workers, that anybody who is coming into contact with LGBTQ folks, why is it important for us to be able to competently work with support and uplift queer folks, particularly here in the South?

Ivy Hill: One of the things that I think is important when we talk about, like I said, a lot of my work is really centered around trans folks. But when we think about trans folks, we think about this being like a really small percent of the population and like a lot of people think like, “well, I've never met a trans person or I'm not going to actually be involved in the situation where I need this training”. But actually, the South is home to more than 500,000 trans people, which is actually like more than any other region in the country. More trans folks live here than any other region in the country. We're dealing with elevated rates of depression and anxiety. And, you know, other health outcomes, too, but specifically around mental health is one of the things that I'm super passionate about. And I think that part of the problem is there's not basic training that's included in curriculum for folks that is adequate. So the doctors that you find or the therapists that you find that are affirming are people who've had to seek out that training themselves, which we offer training, if that's something that anybody who's hearing this is interested in. Please feel free to reach out, it's one of my favorite parts of my job is getting to talk to folks who want to do better and learn more and understand that they're going to make mistakes. But it matters so much to make that effort. And also, when we talk about that, like, I think it's important to talk about the fact that, like you, there are some doctors in areas. This is just kind of what happens that become like the trans doctor or like the queer doctor. Like, they're the one where everybody goes because they know that like they have experience and they're going to be friendly and they're going to be treated with respect when they go see that service provider.

Ivy Hill: But I can't overstate how important it is for folks like front office staff to also get regular training. One, there's a much higher turnover rate there, but two, if I call the office, I'm not going to be getting that doctor who is maybe a rock star, best doctor for trans folks. That's not who I'm going to get on the phone. So, if I get on the phone with somebody and their misgendering me or they're treating me rudely, I'm not going to feel comfortable to even make it into the office. and you can be in a situation where a front office staff is outing you in front of everybody else who is in the waiting room, they can put you in potentially really dangerous situations. So, it's just so important to seek out that training. It's really so important on a systemic level that we change curriculum so that folks who are getting degrees in social work and are going into service professions that is baked into the curriculum that they're going to leave with, right? We're not there yet, but we do offer these trainings for folks, and it's so much more than just nurses and doctors that need that training.

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): Absolutely, and I think you nailed it really well. You have to, we have to do better about integrating it into the very foundations of what we're learning. It's really important that our education not only centers around discrimination and general and equity in general, but how specifically we as clinicians can impact and improve the lives and outcomes of our LGBTQ folks in the communities that we serve, because whether we know it or not, we are coming into contact with. LGBTQ people and we are everywhere. It's not just if you look visibly one way or another way, it's that you're aware we're here and we exist, and it's important that people understand how to properly work with people so it's affirming, and we feel safe in these spaces. As we talk about the importance of integrating this education in this awareness into different fields, particularly in the medical and helping professions. How does

that impact policy development and how does that impact the promoting of LGBTQ rights and dignity?

Ivy Hill: So, we've seen it across the South and specifically in South Carolina. We just had another attempt introduced to ban medical care for trans youth. Really, I think that this most recent one was anyone under 21, not even just under 18. And also included mental health care, not just like hormone replacement therapy or stuff like that, which obviously folks also need to access.

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): I mean, not only is that disturbing to hear that that's just policies that continue to be introduced, but when people have misunderstanding about the basic needs of LGBTQ folks, what does it mean to be affirming? What does it mean to have access to appropriate and affirming care and the risks that we take with our youth and adults and adults who belong to the LGBTQ community? The risks that we take when we don't offer that care, that's really important for us to consider. And so thank you for touching on that because I think it's really important for us to just know how day to day interactions can impact policy development. And for those of us, because, like I said, ETSU focuses primarily on clinical social work, although why is it important for clinicians to be engaged and not just learning this basic information and affirming information for LGBTQ folks, why is it important for us to also engage in policy practice?

Ivy Hill: Yeah, So I mean, I think about like the medical bills that we've been fighting and youth who are impacted by it have been really powerful messengers when it comes to talking to legislators, legislators, but also doctors and providers are people who have been incredibly powerful messengers and making that difference when they when they go to vote. If a medical provider has showed up at a hearing and they've brought facts and experiences of people who they work with, that does a lot to change hearts and minds of the people who are the ones who are voting on these policies. So, these things are deeply intertwined with one another.

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): And bringing that lived experience to the front lines, when you're talking about advocacy and policy changes, I think that is really how we connect these sometimes nebulous concepts, especially if we're not directly in contact in community with people where these policies are being affected. That lived experience changes the hearts and minds of our legislators, of people that are voted into offices to people creating these policies in general. How does lived experience come up for you and the work that you do?

Ivy Hill: Yeah, it was the whole reason that I came to this work in the first place. There were so many of us who do grassroots work. I think grassroots work across the board, but at least where my experience is, is what I can speak to. So many of us who do grassroots work for LGBT folks. We didn't come to this work because we have a degree in nonprofit administration or like we, that's not where the passion is, the passion is the population who we're working with. For me, I know firsthand how lonely it was to grow up as a trans person in rural South Carolina. I know how badly I needed that community. I know how badly I needed resources. At the time when we started gender benders, gender and CSC partnered together a lot and have a lot of

programs that we work on together. But at the time when we started that, if you wanted to find a trans friendly provider who where you could get hormone replacement therapy or stuff like that transition related medical care, the only way to find one was really to know someone else who was trans, who was willing to talk to you about what doctors they went to. Either that or get on the phone and call over and over and over again, which really takes a toll on folks. So, I think that's like, anyway, that lived experience for me is the whole reason why I'm in the work and have so much to do with the programs that we run at both jobs.

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): Absolutely, and I don't think this work could be authentic without limited experience at the table and pushing forward and creating these programs because without that experience, people are just kind of grabbing at straws and seeing what fits and doesn't fit. And so thank you for bringing your lived experience into the work that you do because I know the impact that it's having, even just in the communities and the youth that I serve. Yeah, absolutely.

Ivy Hill: And when I think about that, like I really, the thing that comes to the top for me is the research arm of work that we do. Like all of the research that we do about trans communities, the people who are leading the focus groups or writing the survey questions or analyzing the data. We are also trans and where people and it makes me think about things like the Tuskegee experiments, where, like white folks were going into black communities to try to do research. And now we don't. We act like we don't understand why there's distrust there. But so many people are recreating the same system by not having people who are most impacted by the issues that were researching or the policies that we're trying to impact, be the ones who are actually leading and shaping what that work looks like. It makes all the difference, you know.

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): Absolutely, and along with that, from your perspective, what does it take for somebody to be an ally to the LGBTQ community?

Ivy Hill: Yeah, I think there's a lot of ways that you can do that get involved with your local grassroots groups, wherever that is, wherever you are. I'm sure that somebody is doing grassroots work in your community. Find them, find out what you can do to support them. If you're in the helping profession, seek out that training, you know, make sure that you're doing everything you can to provide culturally competent care to folks. Those are some of the things that come to the top for me immediately, but also like pay attention to what's happening in your local legislature, especially if you're in the South. No matter where you are, if you're in the south, there is legislation that is trying to be passed that is negatively going to impact LGBT folks if it does pass. There's a way for you to get involved in that, whether it's calling your representatives or writing letters or showing up to testify at hearings or finding out who's doing that, organizing work, and donating to them following the leadership of folks who are most impacted. There's so many ways that you can get involved and can help, and we need your help, and we can't be the only ones who are out here doing it. If we are, we are not going to win.

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): Absolutely because it takes a whole community and that takes our lives, who can create those bridges, especially for legislators and policymakers that have historically voted for, or voted for or have promoted anti LGBTQ legislation? Those bridges are really important and really vital and something that I have learned and the work that I do is also taking space and making space where it takes space, where if you're an ally that doesn't belong to the LGBTQ community takes place in non-LGBTQ spaces, you know, educate your coworkers as much as you can point them in the right direction and show them the organizations they can support in the grassroots efforts that are happening. But then when you are in a situation where LGBTQ folks should be at the center of the conversation should be the people advocating, taking space, and let folks advocate for themselves. But your presence is really important at those events and those efforts. So, you know, it's one of those things that I've learned, and because of programs through Campaign for Southern Equality and other grassroots organizations where I have learned that as well. And so again, just super grateful for all of the ways that I have learned, particularly in the last decade or so.

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): We've already talked about seeking trainings and listening to our clients and the people we serve. and what does it mean to be an affirming practitioner. Are there other concrete examples that you can provide about how new budding clinicians can still engage in policy practice to support their LGBTQ clients and their families? Or is there anything else that folks should know about as they are entering into the helping field?

Ivy Hill: One of the things that comes at the top for me is the impact that you can have at the practice where you are. So, what is your intake paperwork look like? You know, is it inclusive? Is inclusive of folks who are trans? Is that inclusive of folks who are non-binary, which, you know, often are the same? But also, we just did some research, where not everybody who is non-binary identifies as trans. So, yeah, what does that paperwork look like? What are your policies look like? Not only for the people who you're serving, but also for people who are going to work there. Like, I can't tell you how powerful it is to go into a practice and see other trans people who are there in leadership positions. So, like what can we do to impact those policies at the place where you are on a local level, at the practice where you are? You know, if you need help reviewing stuff like that, that's something that we do as organizational assessments. But also, there are people, I'm sure, in your local area wherever you are, there are grassroots leaders who you could go to and who are also doing this work. So there's, you know, there's the bigger stuff like showing up for legislation and those types of fights being there for community. But there's also like it's so important to make the impact that you can where you are. And if we all did that, what a different south this would be, you know?

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): Absolutely, and I think that sums it up really beautifully, like the efforts at the state and federal levels are really important and should be things that we are all working towards, whether we're allies or folks that belong to the LGBTQ community. But it's also about making change in our immediate communities where we're serving, where we're working, where we exist, right? And you know, there's been such a push in recent years, in particular for companies and organizations to develop diversity, equity and inclusion policies. But we also know that sometimes those policies aren't really like making much of a difference

when it comes to hiring practices for retaining staff or supporting staff. Do you have any thoughts outside of what you just suggested of how organizations and schools and universities can create a more inclusive and desirable place for LGBTQ people to want to work and to do their own work?

Ivy Hill: That's such a good question. I think a lot of it has to do with policies. I think a lot of it has to do with when those practices that are like what the culture actually is, where you are, even if the policies in place, if it's if the culture is not in alignment with it. If you're seeing practices that are discriminatory or not friendly or welcoming to LGBT folks call that out, have conversations with administration as particularly if you are an ally to the community. Those are the places where we really need you to have those conversations where you can have a huge impact on folks. And then, you know, hire more trans people, hire more queer people. When we see ourselves reflected in the places where we're going to get services, it makes us feel so much more comfortable and we won't seek out the care that we need unless we feel comfortable there. because we've experienced so many traumatic experiences at doctor's offices or with therapists who, you know, are engaging in stuff like conversion therapy and stuff like that. So, yeah, just call those things out when you see them change the policy and then if the practices aren't in line with it, use the power that you have, use the privilege that you have to advocate on behalf of communities that don't have that same power and privilege.

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): You speak such truth to that, and I can't add anything to that because I think you summed it up really beautifully. Thank you so much for your time and your effort and energy today. I think that everything that you have to share resources, your perspectives, your experience are really, really important. And I hope resonates with not just Bachelor social work and master social work students, but just university students in general. And I hope it resonates with not just bachelor social work and master social work students, but just university students in general.

Ivy Hill: Well, I want to say thank you so much. It's been a blast hanging out with you. And just as a final thought, if you're a trans person, you're a queer person, if you're an LGBTQ person who's listening to this and want you to know that you're not alone, particularly if you're in the south, if you're in a rural area, I know that it can feel really lonely, but there are little pockets of such vibrant community all across the south. So find us, get connected with us. You know feel free to reach out to us at CSC, and we can help you find people in your local area if you're having a hard time finding your folks to connect with. But you are absolutely not alone, even when it feels like it. And there are so many people out here who have your back and who are rooting for you, and you don't have to do it by yourself.

Whitney Rosenblatt (she/her): Awesome, thank you so much, Ivy.