

## Webinar: Providing Affirming Services to LGBTQ+ Youth Experiencing Homelessness

December 9, 2021, 2:00 – 3:00 pm EST

The Homeless and Housing Resource Center (HHRC) and SAMHSA's Center of Excellence on LGBTQ+ Behavioral Health Equity will present an engaging panel discussion about affirmative services and supports for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness. For providers working in housing and homelessness, knowing about the unique experiences of LGBTQ+ youth is essential in providing quality and appropriate care. This panel will discuss the unique needs of the population and ways providers and clinicians can provide supportive and affirming care.

### Speakers:

1. **Martel Okonji**, M.A., Director of Innovations, Safe Place for Youth
2. **Jesi Harris**, MUP, Planning and Land Use Consultant, Brian Silveira & Associates

### Learning Objectives

1. Describe the importance of strength-based approaches like healing-centered engagement when creating and maintaining safe spaces for youth participants who identify with the LGBTQ+ community.
2. Identify potential risk factors associated with youth's family-of-origin and protective factors chosen-families offer youth participants who identify with the LGBTQ+ community.
3. Explore authentic engagement with youth using youth-driven solutions like youth-run boards, ambassadors, and peer support.

### Presenter Bios

#### [Martel Okonji, M.A.](#)

Martel Okonji has been an active community organizer for over 11 years. He has involved himself with various actions such as: spearheading the first permanent LGBTQ Resource Center at Cal State Northridge (CSUN Pride Center), acting as a fellow in the TAKE XXI Program, involvement with Students for a New American Politics and the Coca-Cola's Next Generation of LGBT Leaders. He has served as President in many clubs and organizations that held movements on campus for inclusivity and awareness, volunteered with Peer Health Exchange and College Summit, and was executive chair with the Queer People of Color Conference in 2012.

Martel completed his undergraduate studies at Cal State Northridge with a Major in Sociology and a minor in Queer Studies, then finished his Master's in Education, emphasizing leadership and change. He is now working towards his Doctorate in Organizational Leadership for the class of 2022.

In 2017, Martel was honored by the City of Los Angeles and California State Officials as a recognized LGBTQ Leader. His consistency to show up for his community was highlighted as he

was chosen to speak in front of Los Angeles City Council. He now works as the Senior Program Manager of Equity, Empowerment and Youth Development at Safe Place for Youth, Adjunct Faculty at Antioch University and New York Film Academy, and currently working on his Doctorate in Leadership and Change.

### Jesi Harris, MUP

Jesi Harris is an Urban Planner with many years of experience working to shift regulatory and material conditions that directly impact vulnerable and underserved community members. She began her career as a Direct Support Professional working to forge independent, actualized lives for disabled adults after graduating from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in her home state. Upon moving to Los Angeles in 2013, she continued her work with vulnerable populations through the LA LGBT Center, first in their shelter and drop-in center for LGBTQ+ homeless youth and then as a Training and Coaching Instructor with the RISE Program. From there, she transitioned into the mobility justice realm, working for two years as the Organizing Director of the LA County Bicycle Coalition and then as the Growth Manager of People for Mobility Justice. She's worked in multiple research capacities in labs focusing on behavioral health and the environmental impacts of economic policies.

She graduated from the University of Southern California with a Master's in Urban Planning and a Certificate in Real Estate Development in May 2021 and currently works as a Planning and Development Consultant for affordable housing developers. She lives in West Hollywood with her brother and their two dogs.