

How Rainbow Changed My Life

Marie, 24, describes how she got connected to Rainbow, and the difference it has made in her life:

I was seeking out counseling because I was very anxiety ridden. I was homeless. I had just gotten assaulted, and I was losing it. I was losing myself. I didn't want to live anymore.

I wanted a clear space where I could go and feel safe. I looked up the closest community center near me, which was Rainbow. I called and left a message, and they called me back the next day. I got into their counseling service, and because I was homeless I got to be in the Homeless Youth Program. Ever since then they've been my family that I get to come home to every Thursday.

They helped me by providing a hotel for me to stay in and transportation so I can go wherever I need to go. I come to the Center for support, counseling, to relax, get food, go to movie night, do the youth empowerment group on Thursdays. I'm one of the older youth so younger ones reach out to me, to have a friend, to ask questions that maybe they don't feel comfortable asking their parents, or maybe there's something they don't understand about queerness. So we older youth become mentors or advocates—and friends—for the younger ones. That's what this whole community center is about: having friends, having advocates, having mentors that want the best for you and are there for you no matter what. The youth program is fun and adventurous. We introduce ourselves by the names we want to use and our pronouns.

I started out as a youth participant and now I also help out and facilitate. I'm trying to do even more facilitating because I want to give back to the community that gave to me. The RCC is not just a community center, it's a home, it's a family, and it's a safe space for any person whether they're lesbian, bi, gay, trans, queer, out or not out yet. It is a home. It is a place where you can feel safe, and where you have a family waiting to welcome you with open arms.

The difference that Rainbow has made in my life is that I'm alive. I'm not dead. I'm not homeless. If it wasn't for getting in touch with Rainbow I would have killed myself, to be honest. I wouldn't be alive today so to them I'm truly grateful. I'm grateful for my life—to be able to eat, to be able to speak, to have a job, to be able to give back to the community that I love and that I'm so passionate about. That's how Rainbow has changed my life: that I'm still living.

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Bringing people of all ages together is amazing. When you're young you don't necessarily see a representation of who you are. For instance, if you're a trans man, you don't necessarily see peers who are trans as well so you might think you're the only one. We have our separate groups by ages but we're all here together, and it's very important for youth to see there are elders just like them that they can look up to. It's important to see the elders who are here, and they're just like you. They are LGBTQ, living their lives to the fullest. If you have a question, or a concern, or you're feeling awkward— don't worry, we've all felt that way. We've come out or we haven't come out, and we know how you feel. We come together as a unity and as a whole, and that's what the rainbow flag is, bringing the community together and uniting us all.

Right now I work full time at Philz Coffee in San Francisco, and go to school full time at Foothill College studying respiratory therapy. I'm hoping to get into Stanford or UCSF one day. I'm here to help. I'm not rich but I'm rich in my heart. That's what's important to me. I will give back to any community that's willing to help and support our youth. It's so important that we unite and we have a home.