

RBR Staff Counseled on Sensitivity to the Transgender Student



Red Bank Regional (RBR) recently invited author, educator and advocate, Seth Rainess, to speak to staff on the topic of, supporting students who self identify as Transgender or Gender Non-conforming. Mr. Rainess works as the Trans-family Group Facilitator with the Jersey

Shore/Monmouth County PFLAG (Parents and Families of Lesbians & Gays). He is uniquely qualified to discuss this subject from both his professional and educational background, with masters' degrees in Psychology and Rehabilitation Counseling, as well as, his own personal journey with transitioning.

Stacy Liss, the Clinical Supervisor for our School Based Youth Service program (The Source) states, "As the number of students who self -identify as transgender and gender non-conforming has increased, so has the need to educate staff and students, on how to be supportive to ensure the safety of these individuals."

Mr. Rainess has presented to a number of schools in Monmouth County. In addition to speaking with staff, Mr. Rainess spoke with the RBR Gay-Straight Alliance, which Ms. Liss advises. The students gained additional perspective from his honesty and directness. Several students received copies of his book, *Real Talk for Teens, a Jump-Start Guide to Gender Transitioning and Beyond*. This book was written to help youth and families address transitioning, which is the process that transgender people may go through to align their body with their gender identity.

Ms. Liss has worked closely with Mr. Rainess on ways to support students who are transitioning and to assist parents in the process. Additionally, he has had conversations with RBR on developing protocol to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our Transgender and Gender Non-conforming students. Ms. Clay added that "Seth's unique perspective and experiences were beneficial to the development process."

While Seth speaks to many groups on transgender support, he believes that educators are integral in helping youth. He explained, "A teacher may be the only person who the student feels comfortable speaking with. Perhaps the student needs help in talking to their family. It is important that the school faculty know they are the eyes and ears and most important the ally for these kids. It is very important to refer the student to a counselor and for the student to feel comfortable with the counselor."

Ms Liss explains, "Young people who identify as Transgender may be at greater risk for mental health issues, such as depression and suicide. In addition, youth who identify as Transgender are at an increased risk for homelessness. It is important that the safety of our youth is assessed and supports are provided when necessary. In addition, resources may be provided for that student to support them outside of school, including referrals for family support and community resources."

Mr. Rainess left us with the reminder that the process requires patience using the analogy, “I always tell kids that you are running a marathon, not a 100 yard-dash. Kids have to be okay with that.”

Ms. Clay added, “The feedback from RBR staff was positive and complimentary. Our staff shared that they appreciated Seth’s knowledge, sharing of his personal experience and honesty. “

Seth Rainess’ book, *Real Talk* was written to give teenagers a guide through their transitioning process and is available online through <http://transgresspress.bigcartel.com>. More information on Seth Rainess and his availability for speaking engagements can be found on his website: <http://www.sethrainess.com/>.