



# ReVision

re (ri) *n.* 1. anew, again vision (vɪz'hən) *n.* 1. the manner in which one sees or conceives of something

## Changing World, Changing Words

The healthy development of youth is an achievement everyone desires. What keeps this such an elusive goal? After 13 years of working in the community, YES Institute has uncovered several key obstacles. These insights have transformed our work, and brought us face to face with what stands in the way of our vision being realized.



Students at Killian Senior High School in a YES Institute training.

In 1996, YES Institute began walking into uncharted territory. There were no gay/straight alliances in schools; in fact, most schools claimed they had no "gay" students—if they could say the word at all. It was a time when we often requested to have the word "gay" included and spoken out loud.

Our mission specifically stated "gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and ALL youth." Our speaking, however, was mostly focused on "gay" and "lesbian" – emphasizing orientation. While supportive, in 1996 we hardly knew what transgender meant. We were yet to learn that the source of the problems we sought to eliminate had very little to do with orientation.



Students engaged in discussion at a YES course.

Interactions with teachers, administrators, parents, and clergy revealed one major obstacle. "We can't talk about 'it,'" they repeatedly told us. When they heard "gay," they thought "sex." Unable to distinguish orientation from behavior, they were paralyzed with fear, and determined to prohibit what seemed inappropriate and harmful.

We asked them, "When are children first called 'faggot' and 'sissy'?" The common response was elementary school, long before children's orientation is known to them or others.

All children are targets for bullying on gender. The most recent research shows that 50% of these incidents in elementary school involve gender or orientation slurs. In 2003, a study of 83,000 students revealed that 80% of youth harassed as gay identify as heterosexual. Harassment, we found, is all about gender. The weapon may be pointed toward orientation, but the mechanism pulling the trigger is gender.

That breakthrough – along with the increasing presence of young people identifying as transgender – led us to commit to studying gender, searching for understanding that would get to the source of the problems.

### Youth Leading the Way

If you ask students how they identify themselves around gender and orientation, the answer may surprise you. Consistently they report their intense dislike for labels – even terms typically thought of as favorable, like "gay" and "straight." Unable to find a comfortable fit in existing labels, youth have often squirmed into an astounding number of new ones: queer, homoflexible, polyamorous, bisectual, transensual, and trysexual, to name a few. Rather than provide more clarity, over 250 such labels make the topics of gender and orientation even more obtuse.

Finally, labels are beginning to lose luster, and youth – once again – are leading the way. More and more, they refuse labels, simply declaring, "I am me." See video interviews with students at [www.yesinstitute.org/video](http://www.yesinstitute.org/video)

### Forward Thinking

Once our eyes were opened to a new way to conceptualize gender, many things looked different. This led us to predict a tsunami headed our way that would bring cultural upheaval around new definitions of gender. It has begun to wash ashore. Today the number one request we receive for education comes from faculty – elementary to high school – who are confused about students undergoing a gender transition. Miami-Dade County Public Schools asked us to create a Gender Resource Guide ([www.yesinstitute.org/gender](http://www.yesinstitute.org/gender)) for this purpose. When the shock of this wave subsides, we will see how profoundly gender and orientation relate to the core of who we are.



Youth in YES Institute's Communication Solutions™ course.

YES Institute is now known as the *source* for knowledge on gender and orientation. People come from the most varied and unlikely places seeking our work. We love being the source, but we are not the *answer*. The answer, we believe, lies in the actions each individual will take. As the illusion of a binary fades under scrutiny of study and observation, our fears will fade and our knowledge will grow. Then we will be on our way to realizing a shared goal of keeping all youth safe.

August 6, 2009, our Board of Directors revised the YES mission statement, changing words to reflect a changing world:

Our mission is to prevent suicide and ensure the healthy development of all youth through powerful communication and education on gender and orientation.

These programs are made possible by your generosity. To participate in keeping all youth safe, visit [www.yesinstitute.org](http://www.yesinstitute.org) and learn more.

Receiving two **ReVision** newsletters?  
Please contact: [tim@yesinstitute.org](mailto:tim@yesinstitute.org) or  
305-663-7195, ext. 1113

# California Parents Say YES



Participants in Communication Solutions™.

Sixty people from across the U.S. joined us at our Summer Education Week, where they learned the unique education models comprising our core curriculum. California-based community organizers Laurin Mayeno, Nidia Sanchez-Rico, Jacqueline Elena Featherston, and Janette Alvarez are committed to transforming conversations around gender and orientation in

**“A life-altering experience! Thank you for giving me tools to tackle the challenges I’m facing. I feel healthier, liberated, and excited! ☺☺**

- Lorrie Delhomme, Administrative Officer, Miami-Dade County

the San Francisco Bay Area. At the conclusion of YES' Communication Solutions™ course, Janette Alvarez said, “Especially in the Latino community, people do not know how to talk about these topics. Now I see a way to break through communication challenges to make a difference for families. I want to bring YES education to my peers in California and start a new dialogue!”

**“Everyday I see kids bullied around gender and orientation. YES dissolved my fear of addressing these incidents. My classroom will be forever changed. ☺☺**

- Elementary school teacher, Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Dr. Charisse Gencyuz from the University of Michigan Medical School is partnering with YES Institute to ensure that medical students receive the most cutting-edge knowledge on gender and orientation. She commented, “It’s imperative that doctors speak openly and accurately on these topics. Recognizing the limitations of labels is paramount in the pursuit of quality, comprehensive care for everyone.”

**“I’ve been trying so hard to understand why I can’t fit into the gender box people expect. For the first time, I feel free to be myself. ☺☺**

-Student, American High School

Parents and youth told of their struggles to stay connected amid fears and conflicting opinions. Jessica, a college student, shared, “When I told my parents I was dating a girl, they sent me away to Ecuador. They think something is wrong with me. Now after being at YES, I feel empowered and not so alone.” Dianne Goldenberg commented, “This is the first time I have spoken about the emotional journey I’ve been on with my daughter. I said some horrible things and was very afraid, but love conquers all. I want to be a resource for families going through similar hardships.”



Karen Katz, CEO of Phi Delta Epsilon International Medical Fraternity; Dr. Charisse Gencyuz, University of Michigan Medical School; and Nidia Sanchez-Rico, Somos Familia, Oakland, CA.

# A Question of Critical Care



YES speaker Virgin Vandervlugt addressing staff of the Comprehensive Family AIDS Program in Fort Lauderdale, FL.

How can healthcare providers navigate concerns of safety, openness, confidentiality, and inclusiveness? Is discussing a patient’s orientation important, or taboo? How do myths and fears around gender and orientation impede quality medical care? Last month, YES trained 125 nurses, doctors, and counselors who face these questions every day.

**“Using the wrong pronoun with a patient who has experienced assault is just another violation they don’t need to face. This training is critical for the work I do! ☺☺**

-Nurse, RTC



Healthcare professionals at Jackson Memorial Hospital.

At the Comprehensive Family AIDS Program, the staff took the rare opportunity to explore how gender and orientation impact their lives. One staffer admitted to making jokes about a client who identified as transgender. She concluded, “It’s a relief to talk openly about these topics! Now we can work together to make our facility as safe as possible for all our patients.”

YES was also invited to the Roxcy Bolton Rape Treatment Center (RTC) at Jackson Memorial Hospital, where an average of 2,000 people are treated annually, 65% under age 18. One RTC staffer said, “I’m afraid to say the ‘wrong’ thing, so I just stay quiet. Now I see that silence makes my patients unsafe.”

A nurse declared her vision of having designated “Gender Safety Leaders” (see YES’ Gender Resource Guide at [www.yesinstitute.org/gender](http://www.yesinstitute.org/gender)) who are trained in YES’ curriculum. Dr. Andrew Ta, Medical Director, is committed to bringing YES education to the entire staff at Jackson Memorial Hospital.

## Gender Without Limits

Iman James, Student at Harvard University

Most of my studies on gender and orientation have remained in the realm of the abstract. YES’ Essentials of Gender and Orientation course shifted my focus away from theory to actual lived experience, and put me in touch with how expectations around gender and orientation profoundly impact my life.



Iman James.

I have experiences that can be perceived as masculine, others as feminine, and still others that are not easily categorized. The truth is, I don’t fit the mold when it comes to gender; no one does.

I know that I may never be able to shake some core beliefs and stereotypes no matter how open my mind is; I’m only human, after all. However, by granting myself access to the full range of human traits, I can realize my full potential – without limits – and be exactly who I am. I feel compelled to do the same for others, and release them from my expectations around gender and orientation, giving them the chance to simply be. That’s change that is tangible, the kind you can touch and feel.

# Kiaora Society Membership

Jonathan and Tina Kislak generously increased their contribution as Kiaora Visionaries. Their enduring support continues to open new opportunities for us to advance our work.

We are grateful to Visionary Lynn Leverett and new Kiaora Leader Lane Park for renewing and increasing their contributions to expand the impact of YES education among Spanish - speaking communities throughout the country and Latin America.

We thank Maria Alonso & Alex Montague for increasing their contribution to become Kiaora Leaders. We also appreciate the continued support of Kevin Miller & Alan Hunter as Kiaora Leaders.

Olga & Ignacio del Valle, Madelaine Doyle, Eva Leivas-Andino, Luis G. Pons, Hortensia Soriano, Rachel Sottile, Patricia Woodson, Mel Wymore, and Joseph Zolobczuk renewed their

membership as Kiaora Mentors. We welcome new Kiaora Mentors Michael W. & Diana B. Maler, Jorge E. Andino II, David Castillo, Martha Fugate, Scott Sasich, and David Schwarz.

For information about joining our Kiaora Society, or to structure your contribution, please contact Eva at 786-301-3940 or email [eva@yesinstitute.org](mailto:eva@yesinstitute.org).



This newsletter has been produced thanks to the generosity of the Bank of America Charitable Foundation. Their longtime support and commitment to our work continues to make a difference for youth and families in our communities.

[www.bankofamerica.com](http://www.bankofamerica.com)

## Featured Exemplar Video

Dr. Teri Wunderman is working to ensure that psychologists receive the latest knowledge on gender and orientation, setting a new standard for care in the mental health community.



Dr. Teri Wunderman.

See the video now:  
[www.yesinstitute.org/video](http://www.yesinstitute.org/video)

## Welcome Scott!

We welcome Scott Sasich to the YES Institute Board of Directors. Scott is Communications Manager at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden,



Scott Sasich.

and he has been involved as a course participant and volunteer since being introduced to our work. His passion for education reflects his commitment to making a difference in the community.

# Communication Solutions™



Evan Bornacelli and Mackenzie Pawliger leading Introduction to Communication Solutions.

It was a record-breaking summer at YES Institute! In June we hosted the largest Communication Solutions™ course in our history with 50 participants. Summer interns Mackenzie Pawliger and Evan Bornacelli developed Introduction to Communication Solutions, and led 2 courses for 20 student leaders – the first YES courses led for students, by students.

Students now have a forum in which to train themselves to speak powerfully about their lives and our mission. We are proud of Evan and Mackenzie for their extraordinary leadership and courage.

## Join us for Speakers Night!

Tuesday, December 1

6 - 9 PM

Deepen your mastery of skills that can transform your ability to make a difference:

- Review our unique communication model
- Meet other YES volunteers
- Receive personalized coaching from YES staff in an informal setting.

Prior completion of YES Institute's Communications Solutions™ is required. Please RSVP by contacting Joseph Zolobczuk at 305-663-7195 or [joseph@yesinstitute.org](mailto:joseph@yesinstitute.org)



YES speakers practicing powerful communication skills.

## Kiaora Society

Kiaora Society members donate \$1,000 or more to YES Institute annually.

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“The limits of my language  
are the limits of my world.”

-Ludwig Wittgenstein

## Broward Tackles Playground Problem



Faculty from Broward County Public Schools engaged in dialogue at a YES training.

The suicides of two 11-year-olds captivated public attention last spring. Persistent bullying with the words “gay” and “faggot” proved deadly. This summer, YES Institute trained elementary and middle school teachers and counselors from Broward County Public Schools, who began exploring what they can do to create safe environments for students.

Fears about breaking the code of silence stood as an obstacle for many. A teacher stated, “I did not know how to address the bullying in my classroom, so I told my students to just ignore it. Now I have tools to take action.” One teacher commented, “Being open on these topics is key to stopping the abuse. All faculty, parents, and students should get this training.”



305-663-7195  
www.yesinstitute.org

### Vision

A community in which all youth develop as healthy individuals free of suicide, violence, and discrimination.

### Mission

To prevent suicide and ensure the healthy development of all youth through powerful communication and education on gender and orientation.

### Statistics

- **50%** of elementary & middle school bullying incidents are based on gender and orientation slurs.
- **80%** of high school youth harassed as gay actually identify as heterosexual.
- Youth who identify as gay or lesbian, and rejected by families, are **8 times** more likely to attempt suicide.
- **32%** suicide rate for youth identifying as transgender.

www.yesinstitute.org/resources/statistics.pdf

### Education Partnerships

Ethical Culture Fieldston School, NY  
North Georgia College & State University  
Episcopal Diocese of Colombia, South America  
Episcopal Diocese of Southeast Florida  
Phi Delta Epsilon International Medical Fraternity  
Teaching Tolerance - Southern Poverty Law Ctr, AL  
The Alliance for GLBTQ Youth, FL

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## YES en Español

Youth and families came together in Principios Esenciales de Orientación, uncertain yet eager to discuss their feelings, fears, and beliefs about gender and orientation. One parent said, “I don’t know how to express myself. In Spanish, many of the terms we use are degrading. I want to learn so I have more confidence when I speak.”

“I’ve been so afraid. Now I have courage to accept my daughter and begin educating others in the Hispanic community.”  
-Hispanic parent

Many youth had kept parts of their lives secret for years, fearful of being rejected by their families and communities. At the completion of the course, one participant shared, “Finally I feel safe to go home.”



Hispanic families in Principios Esenciales de Orientación, facilitated by Eva Leivas-Andino.