



MLK Executive Director, Heather Hole Strout placing BRAVE Space decal on the center's Edward Street door.

Five Newport Organizations Announce BRAVE Space Certification

By Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center

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Five local organizations – the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center, Bike Newport, FabNewport, Conexión Latina and Women's Resource Center – recently participated in a pilot project to gain BRAVE Space certification. "B.R.A.V.E." – an acronym for Belonging, Respect, Acceptance, Validity and Equity – certification indicates spaces the LGBTQIA+ community will feel safe, welcome, and validated.

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Thanks to COVID relief funding from the Rhode Island Department of Health, the project started as a collaborative pilot between the MLK Community Center and the Newport Health Equity Zone LGBTQ+ Health Working Group (HEZ) to create a Safe Zone certification applicable to non-healthcare organizations, building upon the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island Safe Zone concept for healthcare agencies

(<https://www.newportri.com/story/news/local/2021/11/03/lgbtq-safe-zones-newport-certified-through-blue-cross-program/6179899001/>).



B.R.A.V.E. Space logo pictured above.

To gain BRAVE certification, participating organizations must examine both client and employee relations and policies and learn how to create a truly safe and welcoming environment for the LGBTQIA+ community, all through an intersectional lens. “Intersectionality” here means the ways that systems of inequalities based on gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, class and other forms of discrimination “intersect” to create unique dynamics and effects ([Center for Intersectional Justice](#)).

“At the MLK Community Center, we are committed to creating an environment where all persons affiliated with the Center, particularly those of us who are people of color, within the LGBTQIA+ community and/or with disabilities, are truly seen and treated with the utmost consideration, respect, and compassion,” said Heather Hole Strout, Executive Director of the MLK Community Center.

The list of 11 criteria were settled upon with the help of the HEZ LGBTQIA+ Working Group and four focus groups consisting of locals who identify with the LGBTQIA+ community. The criteria range from genderless signage for restrooms to creating inclusive hiring policies that embrace cultural and gender diversity.

While there are very concrete criteria to becoming a BRAVE Space, some criteria may already be in place, and some may take some time to implement. The goal of the project is to make significant changes in each organization’s culture and creates parameters to work toward more equitable policies and procedures in the future.

“Conexión Latina Newport is very excited to be a designated BRAVE space and publicly announce that designation. The training and organizational changes we have undergone through this process have enabled and inspired us to pay specific attention to pertinent details that we have not always been aware of, or paid enough attention to,” said Rebekah Gomez, Executive Director of Conexión Latina.

“We will be kicking off our LGBTQIA+ inclusion efforts by hosting a Domestic Violence Prevention Campaign workshop specifically tailored to LGBTQ youth ages 13-17 years old, and the unique issues that they face. It will be Conexión Latina’s first specifically focused event for the community, and I consider it to be an important step in our BRAVE Space work,” she said.

“The Women’s Resource Center becoming a BRAVE Space isn’t the end, but a start to ensuring that we are creating inclusive spaces and services that every individual feels safe and empowered to access,” said Jessica Walsh, Executive Director of the Women’s Resource Center.

“The BRAVE Space workshops have informed the team on how to increase inclusiveness, which enhances our ability to serve all students with equity,” said Steve Heath, Executive Director of FabNewport.

“The BRAVE Space training and certification was an exceptional experience for the Bike Newport team, and we are grateful to be part of the inaugural group,” said Bari Freeman, Executive Director of Bike Newport. “We are committed to prioritizing inclusivity and equity in a welcoming and respectful environment that elevates representative leadership and lenses. Because our agency values inclusive practices, we were able to share our experience of intentions, process, and outcomes, while continuing to improve and refine our methods from what we experienced and learned together at this training. Bravo, BRAVE Spaces!”

“Being a BRAVE space is vital way to support our LGBTQIA+ community. At the MLK, it’s a natural extension of our core values,” Hole Strout, of the MLK, said. “We look forward to other organizations in our community taking this important step towards being inclusive for all.”

Look for the BRAVE Space logo in the windows of these organizations and many more to come!

To find out more information about how to become a BRAVE Space, please contact Melanie Saunders, Community Programs Manager of the MLK Community Center, at 401-846-4828, ext. 124 or msaunders@mlkccenter.org.