

We Can Hear You

A campaign with global impact that encourages LGBTQ youth to participate in a creative art form that allows them to participate in a safe sacred space with virtual connectivity to express themselves and to feel seen and heard.



The What

We Can Hear You is a national campaign, ideally launched by a high-level person of influence for maximum exposure, with various outlets for mass marketing, that invites LGBTQ youth to participate in an exploratory art experience, and then to share that experience in a public forum.

Participants will be encouraged to “communicate” something that is difficult for them to put into words by using safe, non-toxic paints to show/paint how they feel.

Shanna Forrestall hosted a sample event in Pasadena last year. She put out a call to people dealing with various life struggles who wanted a venue to feel, express themselves, and work through some emotions. Attendees ranged in age/sex/demographics, etc.

One of our participants was dealing with the loss of his beloved wife to cancer. Another one (a member of the LGBTQ community) was planning a major move to a new city where he didn't know ANYONE. Several were in major life transitions. The results were phenomenal.

We want to create this experience in a more structured environment in several cities - perhaps in a road trip at the launch - so we can collect quality video footage, and better post interviews. Then use that to create assets like social media stories, a documentary and/or perhaps a reality show that continues.

Ideal targets might be young members of the LGBTQ community, but the idea is also applicable to: women or POC who have survived past trauma, bullying or abuse; survivors of sexual and spousal abuse; those dealing with the loss of loved ones; individuals suffering from PTSD caused by military service, traumatic events and/or natural disasters and more; or people who are simply undergoing major life transitions that are dealing with fear or anxiety (impending divorce, pregnant spouse, etc.).

By offering a chance to participate, we can create a forum for individuals who feel isolated in their pain to communicate in a safe, healthy way. With this campaign, they can participate in a global experience that validates how they feel, and allows them a useful form of expression. They would be models for

advocacy and victim support, and provide tools/resources for coping - without the participant ever having to share intimate details, address an abuser, or put themselves at risk.

Obviously, this is not meant to be a replacement for therapy or professional help, but it could be a very useful and important conversation starter to help individuals deal with the things that feel too overwhelming to talk about.



The ideal plan would be multi-pronged in approach.

- The program might start with an advertising/social campaign to raise awareness, and put out a call for young people to participate in a series of live events from La to LA (New Orleans to Los Angeles).
- The road trip team would contain the producers/facilitator and local partners in each city (perhaps non-profits who support LGBTQ youth). The team would also provide the necessary supplies with a documentary team that would collect BTS footage, event footage, and stories/interviews from participants willing to share their story on camera.
- Footage from the road trip would be used to launch a global online platform that encourages people all over the world to participate, and to create a documentary highlighting LGBTQ stories of struggle and success. It could also feature notable members of the LGBTQ who are willing to share personal stories.



The Who

Shanna's priority right now is LGBTQ youth because of the data showing that bullying and suicide rates are rising, but she is open to using the idea helping a variety of demographics who can benefit.

About the Producer, Shanna Forrestall

Shanna Forrestall is a survivor of physical, mental, emotional, sexual and religious abuse that began at the early age of 5 with sexual abuse by a family friend. She is from an ultra-conservative Protestant, low-income family in South Louisiana, and understands the effects of poverty and ignorance. She has also had two bouts with long-term chronic pain (due to car accidents) in her lifetime and has a keen sensitivity for people who are suffering.

She has participated in humanitarian aid projects around the world since her 20's and, since Hurricane Katrina, has worked as a volunteer after multiple natural disasters in Louisiana, Texas, and her new home state of California collecting supplies, providing short-term and long-term relief and supplies as well as donations, and capturing stories so that we can learn from each disaster to better prepare for the next.

Shanna has always been an advocate for under-served and bullied populations, and is a long-term advocate for women, POC, young people with autism and LGBTQ youth. She is a firm believer in the power of storytelling, and believes that real-life stories must be told so that society can evolve towards greater empathy.

Shanna has experience in advertising, marketing and public relations. She is experienced in front of the camera as an actress and host, and behind the camera as a producer for film/TV and digital content for social media. See [IMDB](#) for a list of her applicable credits.

Currently, Shanna mentors and hires up to 5 young people on the autism spectrum monthly. She just released a children's book (with the assistance of her team) and several digital stories from the 2018 #CampFire. She volunteers regularly with non-profits for people and animals in need.

Shanna has worked (with professional therapy and personal study) to become a healthy, happy, and balanced person who contributes to society in positive ways. She is in a loving and respectful relationship with her beautiful husband Gary and her adopted feline, Beau.

Shanna's personal goal is to hug as many people in pain as possible, and to increase the empathy level in humans in America and beyond.

The Why

- **Depression is on the rise among LGBTQ youth.**

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/mental-health-problems-rise-significantly-among-young-americans/2019/03/14/5d4ffe8-460c-11e9-90f0-0ccfeec87a61_story.html?arc404=true&tid=ik_inline_manual_9

- **Suicide Rates are increasing among LGBTQ youth**

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/09/30/tennessee-teen-channing-smith-instagram-lgbt-killed/>

- **LGBTQ Acceptance Among Young Adults Drops, Says GLAAD: 'Nothing Today Should Be Taken for Granted'**

“A new survey shows young adults in the U.S. are now less accepting of LGBTQ people, GLAAD announced on Monday....”

<https://apple.news/AldbjcxPaTpeIWbkdkU75vg>

- **Social Media Can Help LGBTQ Kids Feel Seen**

“I don’t have cable. I don’t pay for streaming services. I don’t have access to the representation I want. So I turn to social media, as do LGBTQ identifying youth who don’t have access either or who can’t openly watch shows with queer characters out of fear of being outed or harassed at home. Tweens and teens take to YouTube, TikTok, Tumblr, Instagram and other platforms to find friends and community. They are looking for advice and encouragement in judgment-free zones.”

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2019/09/20/importance-social-media-when-it-comes-lgbtq-kids-feeling-seen/>

The How

Instead of believing that America is going to simply “dumb down” with it’s overuse of short form, slang, emoticons, gifs and other digita/social forms of communicatoin, Shanna believes that we can challenge people to take their love of creative communication and to use it in more mature ways.

By learning to harness creative tools like paint, color and experience we can model - how to truly experience emotion - process that emotion - how to be truly present, authentic and honest - and how to find our peace with cathartic creative experiences.

Shanna believes that we can teach individuals how to be educated advocates that will “hold space” as needed for themselves and others.

Similar Concepts

Old Town Road

“Hooky, short and wildly loopable, “Old Town Road” took off on the app TikTok, which allows users to create video clips set to music.”

<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/lil-nas-x-old-town-road-810844/>

The Ice Bucket Challenge

“On 15 July a golfer in Florida, Charles Kennedy, was nominated by a friend to do an Ice Bucket Challenge. At the time, the challenge was not connected to a particular charity, but Mr Kennedy decided that the money raised by his ice bucket challenge should go to ALS because his cousin suffered from the disease...Mr Frates is credited with helping the challenge truly go viral after he posted a video nominating friends and stars including US football player Tom Brady.”

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/the-filter/virals/11046482/How-the-ALS-Ice-Bucket-Challenge-started.html>

Kiki Challenge (Drake/In My Feelings)

“The reason people are doing this in the first place, of course, is because of #inmyfeelings, the latest social media challenge to go viral, inspired by Drake’s single of the same name and a video uploaded by Instagram comedian Shiggy that shows him dancing to the song.”

<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/in-my-feelings-kiki-challenge-drake>

The Bully Project (Documentary/etc.)

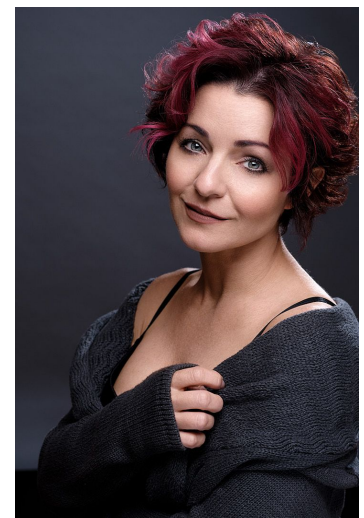
“There are other kids in the story: Kelby, a young lesbian from Oklahoma whose father explains that after she came out, people he’d known for years started refusing to acknowledge him on the street..”

<https://www.npr.org/2011/06/23/137362129/the-bully-project-finds-its-moment>

Contact

For more information contact Shanna Forrestall at 225-413-2405 or shanna.forrestall@gmail.com.

Please make sure you view the corresponding pitch video by Shanna Forrestall at www.forrestallconsulting.com/we-can-hear-you.



To Whom It May Concern:

I first met Shanna as a teenager when we both lived in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I was raised in a conservative evangelical Christian family, but I was drawn to the arts and creative experimentation at a young age. In middle school, my twin and I began to develop more as artists, and by high school, we had found what would become our home disciplines: for me, this was dance, and for my twin, this was visual art. But we did not have a map for how to be artists in our southern hometown, and we certainly didn't know how to bridge the space between the conservative traditions of our family's faith with the innovative and unfamiliar terrain of artistic practices. In other words, we did not know how to be Christians and artists, and I remember feeling alienated from both communities and identities. I think our parents were as lost and confused as we were. They tried to be supportive, and in many ways they were, even when they didn't know how. Then a family friend suggested that we should meet Shanna.

Shanna became a kind of mentor and collaborator to us. She was someone who was already working to bring experimental artistic practices into religious and spiritual contexts in Baton Rouge. Spending time together making art, collaborating on exhibitions and performances, giving talks and workshops at local churches, Shanna guided us into our own processes of becoming. Most of all, she gave us an experience of belonging at a time when we needed it most.

What Shanna did not know when we first met—what I was hardly ready to recognize for myself—was that I was queer, deeply closeted by the weight of the Christian culture and family in which I found myself, with questions about my gender that I did not even know how to ask. Before I even had words for these ways of understanding myself outside of the normative conditions and cultural frames I had been given, Shanna provided a vital context in which I experienced acceptance and even celebration of the parts of myself that made me different.

When I was a freshman in college at a small Christian university in Mississippi, Shanna was one of the first people I told that I was queer. Even though I was terrified to speak those words out loud, even though some part of me was convinced that I would no longer be loved if I was known in the ways that I knew myself, some other part of me trusted in the resiliency of our connection and the acceptance that Shanna had always shown to me. I think we were both challenged in our relationship at the time of that initial disclosure, but what unfolded in the years that followed taught me what my relationship with Shanna had always taught me: that no matter what, I was accepted, appreciated, and loved. She continued to drive over to Mississippi for visits from Louisiana over the next several years. When I was back in Baton Rouge visiting family, we continued to make time to be in one another's lives. Throughout the process of coming out to my community and family, losing many relationships because of the perceived incompatibility between my sexuality and their faith, and experiencing rejection from my own family of origin, Shanna was an abiding source of stable, reliable attachment and love.

Now as an adult, living my life as a queer person, a genderqueer/nonbinary person, as an artist, a healer, and an educator, it feels so clear to me that I am where I am now only because I had the support and acceptance of people like Shanna in my life. I am now a professor of queer studies, gender studies, dance, and environmental studies at Denison University. I hold a PhD, and I have made a successful and rewarding life as a choreographer and performer. I am an advocate in queer and trans communities, and I maintain a consulting practice using ritual traditions to support people

in their personal healing and collective liberation. I can do this work now only because there were people in my life who were willing to hear and hold my stories when I needed them most.

When Shanna shared with me her vision for the *We Can Hear You* project, it felt like a full-circle moment for the experiences we shared so many years ago. Giving people coming from diverse experiences a platform with which to explore and express what cannot be put into words has the potential to be profoundly affirming not only for those individuals but also for witnesses and audiences to this project. LGBTQ youth in particular need these kinds of opportunities to not only experience acceptance and affirmation from others, but to be given the resources with which to practice acceptance and affirmation within themselves. We are living at a time when not only are these marginalized populations particularly vulnerable to bullying, harassment, and systemic abuse, but also when the language and available frameworks for how we understand gender and sexuality are changing rapidly. It is not an understatement to say with certainty that we do not yet have words or language for the complexity of our experiences of desire and identity. *We Can Hear You* has the potential to give LGBTQ youth an experience of acknowledging and expressing the parts of themselves that feel the most unrecognized and the most uncertain, specifically in the gaps of our existing language and understanding.

I want to offer my full recommendation and endorsement of Shanna and this project. I trust her to create brave, supportive spaces in which to honor and celebrate the lives of LGBTQ youth, and I trust her to hold and honor their stories as well. I hope that you will give this project your complete support and investment of resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael J. Morris". The signature is fluid and elegant, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Michael J. Morris, PhD (they/them/their)
Visiting Assistant Professor, Denison University
Department of Dance, Queer Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, and Environmental Studies
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I'm writing to take a little time to reflect on the impact of my long friendship with Shanna Forrestall, particularly the ways that she provided support and context in formative years of my development as an artist in the process of understanding and accepting my own queerness.

Shanna and I met in 2002 when a mutual friend encouraged her to visit my very first solo exhibition of collages and paintings at the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge. I was born and raised in southern Louisiana in a very conservative, religious family, and found myself transgressing expectations for who I was going to be as an adult, ways I expressed my gender, what kind of art I was making, and even how I dressed. I think it's important to convey that I was young enough and relatively sequestered that I wasn't even aware of the ways that I was being disruptive. What I did know is that I had much bigger feelings than I knew what to do with, and that I felt enormous lack for conversations and activities that supported my explorations into the ways that art can reveal, heal, and transform.

My first memory of Shanna was at a coffee house where she arrived wearing a rhinestone encrusted belt buckle in the shape of giant red lips. We shared an instant rapport, and over the subsequent several years, she brought my sibling (who is transgender, and also an academic) along for adventures in and around our hometown that brought us in contact with much more experimental, experiential, non-judgmental approaches to self investigation and compassionate living within diverse communities. We would make trips to New Orleans or smaller towns, sometimes stopping on the side of the road for impromptu photo shoots, or evening picnics where groups of artistically-inclined youth and creative adults would journal, paint, pray, and reflect in group conversations. Many exhibitions, dance performances, interactive art experiences, fundraising efforts, and thoughtful responses to the social climate around race, gender, and sexuality in the American South resulted from these explorations.

It's been very pleasurable to keep up with Shanna's continued work with many diverse communities, and the ways that she effects change with arts and culture as vibrant tools for making life more livable for those who feel different, excluded, or disenfranchised. I share her concerns for those young people in the U.S. who are caught at a challenging period of personal development amidst a number of cultural shifts that have enhanced more fear, hatred, divisiveness, and oppositional, tribal mentalities in our nation. Her preliminary pilot for We Can Hear You is predicated on a formalized structure that reflects the experiments in care and support that gave me means to thrive and shift towards habits of self love that have persisted into my adult years. The cultivation of spaces and efforts such as these seems vital.

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Morris', with a stylized, flowing script.

Matt Morris

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