

Therapist works to fill void in LGBTQ+ services

By Allison Collins
Contributing Writer

Therapist Cate Richardson-Henley offers clients in the LGBTQ-plus community uniquely informed services.

Richardson-Henley has been practicing for about 30 years, with a focus on LGBTQ-plus support for about 18.

"I'm a member of the LGBTQ community, so I have insight into struggles that people in the community face, because I have faced some of these struggles," she said. "I graduated with my MSW in '95 ... and, in terms of psychotherapy, that's been 18 years, and over that period of time, I've been working with people who are transgender or LGBTQ-plus. I have specialized training to work with LGBTQ-plus people. There are not a lot of trainings out there, but whenever one comes up, I try to attend it. And I'm trained to write letters for people who want surgery to change their gender. I won't just take on a client and write a letter; I need to work with the client for a couple months and I need to know that person.

"I often meet with people early in their journey where, inside, they feel trans, but don't know where to get started," Richardson-Henley continued. "So, I often help people with that and where to start and what are some common things trans folks do to transition. And everybody's journey is different; not everybody wants surgery or hormones or laser hair removal ... and that's important. Everybody is different and you have to respect that about your clients, in all cases. The other thing I do with my trans or nonbinary clients is, they deal with a lot of dysphoria, so I work with them on that. I also have had family sessions with my clients and their family members to help their families be more accepting of them and

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that has mixed results; it doesn't always work, but I'm willing to do that."

Though Richardson-Henley said her clientele is not limited to members of the LGBTQ-plus community, and is largely "cis and straight," she said providing the community support and safety is increasingly important.

"We live in a very conservative county and, I have to say, I don't feel super safe here," she said. "If you look more in-depth on my website, I come out and talk about being married to my partner, but it's not an area where it's particularly safe to be queer or trans.

"This is a very hard time to be LGBTQ-plus, with all the reactionary legislation that's happening all across the country," Richardson-Henley continued. "We're very lucky to live in New York, where we have supportive legislature, but not everybody has that privilege and some people live in states where you're not supposed to say 'gay' in school, or they're putting severe limitations on what age you're allowed to learn about sexual orientation and different gender identities. The ages they're picking are much older than is appropriate and, really, this is something that should be talked about right along in your education."

Richardson-Henley, who services adults exclusively, said as LGBTQ-plus visibility has risen, so has the need for services.

"It's become more common to be out as queer, and it's become more acceptable," she said. "So, yes, (need is increasing), just because people are more likely to get in touch with those feelings and not repress them.

"I think that has something to do with it and, now that I've had my own practice for almost four years and have started advertising this specific specialty, people seek me out. And any advertising I do, I talk about this specialization that I have."

Because Richardson-Henley serves clients remotely, she said, her patient base is far-reaching.

"I see people across New York state," she said. "I moved from the Capital Region about four years ago to this area, so a lot of my clients are from the Capital Region and they followed me, although it is virtual. I also have a lot of people who know my work who refer to me. It's actually been harder for me to break into Otsego County."

Richardson-Henley said, for ease of billing as she nears retirement age, she "only takes a couple of insurances, then it's private pay."

Richardson-Henley said she hopes to build on her LGBTQ-friendly services while staying abreast of relevant changes within that community.

"I want to continue to educate myself about the issues facing LGBTQ-plus clients," she said. "One thing I've found



Therapist Cate Richardson-Henley is shown in this undated photo. | CONTRIBUTED

is, the language is constantly changing, so you have to keep up to date on that. Also, you have to keep up to date on what kinds of things are going on in the media relating to queer and transgender folk, so you know what kind of stressors they might have, and you have to keep up to date on legal changes that might happen. Also, in terms of Otsego County, I really want to move to a bigger space so I can see people in person."

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