Unit One addressed the big picture of labor market realities—which industries are growing, which are shrinking, and technology’s impact on the market. They learned about a wide range of direct service careers in Community and Social Services and also considered indirect service provider careers that exist in the industry. They learned about the various kinds of career families and employer types available to employees in the Community and Social Services sector.

Unit Two addressed the inner workings of the job-seeker. What are her interests and passions? What kind of work environment will she enjoy? What careers should she consider based on what she knows about herself and what factors might influence someone making a career change? Students also learned to navigate career database websites, assess their own interests and conduct a group research project about careers in the Community and Social Services sector.

In Unit Three, students learned what it takes to prepare for a career in Community and Social Services, including the kinds of training and education opportunities that are available for someone interested in this field, the roles of volunteerism, internships, and field placements. They also learned about the importance of professional licensure in this sector.

In Unit Four students heard from Community and Social Service workers themselves, through firsthand accounts and interviews in text and video, and discussed what they learn. After learning about particular careers as a class, they conducted further research on Community and Social Service careers of their choice.

Unit Five addressed how to leverage existing and potential professional networks for job seeking, explore the job search process, including analyzing help wanted ads, learn about workplace expectations, and engage with a panel of Community and Social Service professionals. Students also learned how to become entrepreneurs, reading about Community and Social Service workers who have started their own businesses and practiced using online resources available to New Yorkers looking to become self-employed.
Unit 6 • Summary

**Summary**

In Unit Six, students learn how Community and Social Service providers can use difficult past experiences to their benefit in the job market. They read narratives, practice new vocabulary and create their personal “pitch”, conducting interview role plays using the new vocabulary.

1. **Personal Experiences Count in Community and Social Services**

In a brief discussion, students are introduced to the idea of leveraging one’s own sometimes challenging past to pursue a career in Community and Social Services.

2. **From Prison to Social Service Professional**

Students read two narratives about Social Service providers who built on their experiences in prison to pursue careers in prison re-entry programs. They both earned High School Equivalency diplomas and college degrees in prison, springboarding their careers in Human Services.

3. **From Community Organizing to Entrepreneurship**

Students read and discuss an article about a community organizer who becomes a barber specializing in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender non-conforming customers, inspired by her negative experiences as a female customer of barber shops. She describes how she uses her experience as a community organizer in her work as a barber, and the steps she took to become one. While not the focus of the activity, guidelines for discussing LGBTQ issues are included.

4. **Language to Leverage Your Personal Experience in Community and Social Services**

Students practice using vocabulary that can be used in cover letters, resumes and job interviews to describe their potential contributions to an organization or business, including how to frame negative experiences from the past in positive lights.

5. **Role Plays: Crafting and “Pitching” Your Story of Employable Qualities**

Using the vocabulary learned in the previous activity, students craft a concise description of themselves and their potential contributions as an employee, then practice it during role plays with a peer.
Section 1

Personal Experiences Count in Social Services

In a brief discussion, students are introduced to the idea of leveraging one’s own experiences of social services to pursue employment in the field.

DISCUSS AS A CLASS

1 Some bilingual job-seekers think being a non-native English speaker will hurt their chances for employment, but many have found the opposite is true. Why do you think that is?
   - As the United States has become and continues to become increasingly diverse, businesses want and need to hire bilingual employees to communicate with their customers or clients, so speaking a language other than English can be an asset. Being bilingual can help a prospective employee land a job and can even help increase the starting pay rate.

2 Similarly, some people with challenging backgrounds, such as incarceration, experience with alcohol and drug abuse, or violence, fear that their past may negatively impact their chances at employment. However, many professionals in the Community and Social Service fields use these difficult experiences when working with clients in need. Why do some social service organizations see these experiences as an asset, a positive contribution to their work?
   - When Social Service providers have experienced trauma or hardship, they may be better able to empathize with and help others facing similar situations.
   - Organizations want to make sure their staff are in touch with the realities faced by their clients. Having staff that include people who have faced similar situations is one way to “keep it real.”

3 Not all employers will see these experiences in a positive way, however. What are some concerns employers might have about hiring someone with a difficult past?
   - They may think:
     - The employee might not be mentally or emotionally stable.
     - The employee’s past may have prevented them from becoming qualified, credentialed professionals.
     - Hearing about a client’s struggles might trigger the professional’s own difficult feelings of similar experiences and even cause them to have flashbacks or retraumatize them.
In addition to having had life experiences similar to those of their clients, some social service providers may have been clients themselves. For example, many domestic violence counselors are themselves survivors of domestic violence and may have used crisis hotlines or counselors, which led them to consider this field of work.

**DISCUSS IN PAIRS**

Ask students to discuss the following questions with a partner:

- Do you think having experienced struggles similar to those of clients is an advantage or disadvantage? Provide reasoning for your responses.
- What challenges do you think an employee will have working with clients who are experiencing events similar to their own past events?
- What are some ways they can manage those challenges in order to be effective with clients?
From Prison to Social Service Professional

Students read narratives about two Social Service professionals who earned High School Equivalency diplomas and Bachelor’s degrees in New York State prisons, then leveraged their incarceration histories to work in the Social Services sector.

PREP

- Be prepared to discuss the following terms: insurmountable and wary.

MATERIALS

- *Hudson Link Alums Discuss their Paths from Prisoner to Provider of Social Services* article
- *From Prison to Provider* handout

EXPLAIN

1. Regardless of how skilled a worker may be, some aspects of a job applicant’s personal history might make employers wary of hiring them. Age, long gaps between employment and disability are a few even though discrimination in hiring is illegal. History of criminal convictions is another that can present enormous challenges to job-seekers. Many formerly incarcerated individuals go on to have very successful careers in the Social Services sector. Some organizations actively seek staff who have experienced similar challenges to those of their clients, including incarceration. The same can be said of recovering substance abusers, survivors of domestic violence and the formerly homeless.

2. You’re going to read about two Social Service providers who earned their High School Equivalency diplomas and ultimately Bachelor’s degrees while in prison in New York, then went on to earn Master’s degrees once released from prison, and have successful careers in Social Service organizations. As you read, mark parts of the text that identify the main ideas.

3. Distribute *From Prison to Provider* and ask students to complete it.

4. When students are finished, discuss their answers as a class.
Hudson Link Alums Discuss Their Paths from Prisoner to Provider of Social Services

http://www.hudsonlink.org

Andre C. (left) and Sean P. (right) are Social Service professionals who both earned Bachelor’s degrees in New York State prisons and Master’s degrees “on the outside” after being released. They leverage their personal experiences in their work in the Social Service sector. Andre is a vocational counselor for Praxis Housing Initiative in Queens, NY. Sean is the Executive Director of Hudson Link, the New York State prison college program of which they are both alums, one of only a handful of prison-based degree granting college programs in the country.
Andre C., Vocational Counselor, Praxis Housing Initiative

Adapted from http://www.hudsonlink.org/Students_Alumni/spotlight

Andre C. and his two sisters were raised in Queens, NY, by his mother and stepfather. As a child, he lived under the abusive rule of an alcoholic stepfather and as a result, learned to hate while most children learned math and science. Andre’s pain, suffering and anger contributed to his being incarcerated in 1982, and when he entered prison, he entered an angry young man. For the first 3 years, Andre continued to act out and as a result of his behavior, he ended up in solitary confinement.

Andre quickly realized that in order to survive, he needed to stop his self-destructive behavior and make positive changes in his life. He knew there had to be more to life than how he had been living. While incarcerated at Sing Sing, Andre enrolled in Hudson Link’s college program and in 2006 he graduated with his Bachelor’s degree in Behavioral Science from Mercy College. Because of his education, he had the opportunity to work as the Director of Pre-release Programming, a facilitator for the domestic violence, fatherhood and life skills programs, and a trainer for the ART program.

“Education opened my eyes to a new set of possibilities and a hope for the future that I never had. Hudson Link gave me the chance to help myself and help others.”

In 2008, Andre was released from prison and was reunited with family and friends. He quickly found employment as the Vocational Coordinator for Praxis Housing Initiative, a homeless shelter. He continued to maintain strong ties with Hudson Link, volunteering to help others obtain their college education and change their lives. Hudson Link encouraged Andre to return to school to further his education.

“With Hudson Link’s help, I was able to return to school and am now pursuing my Master’s degree in Organizational Leadership at Mercy College. And thanks to help from Hudson Link’s Alumni Support Program, which provided me with a new laptop computer, I have just obtained my first “A” in graduate school and now have an even brighter future.”

Andre, who resides in Queens with his wife, three children and mother, looks forward to completing his Master’s degree and helping Hudson Link further its mission of providing higher education in prison.
Sean P., Executive Director of Hudson Link

Sean is the Executive Director of Hudson Link and a graduate of the program. He served time for murder and emerged with a college degree.

Adapted from an interview with Anne Strainchamps

I had been in and out of the system since I was eight years old. My mother had me when she was relatively young, she was 17 years old. My father was in prison since I was five years old, and he was never around when he was out of prison. When I first came to Sing Sing and I went to B Block, I remember that night silently crying to myself, “Oh man, what can I do with myself, what am I going to do with my life, out of a 20-year sentence, what am I going to do?”

I went in when I was 16 and when I came home in 2002, I had more time in prison than out of prison. When I left the gates of Sing Sing, I was 33 years old. The only thing I had with me was my college degree. It was a pretty scary time because I’d watched so many people come back over the years and I found out soon enough that the only thing I needed was that degree.

Many of the older guys would see me and say, “Hey, it’s great that you’re staying positive and going to school while the rest of us are going to play cards or work out or watch T.V., but just remember that even though that’s a positive thing, it’s never going to help you when you get out.” That was the constant theme, and when I did finally go home, and interviewed for a job, as soon as I got to the part where I say I was in prison and I was in prison for 16 years, I thought they’re going to just tell me, “Thanks but no thanks.”

I’ve always struggled as a student academically. I remember going through pre-college classes before I was allowed to get into college. I remember getting papers back with C’s and C minus and saying, “Wow, I’m going to have to put some work into this. This is not something I’m just going to show up and do and do well.” It was in the ‘80’s, and in the 80’s in the New York State Department of Corrections, everyone was required to work seven days a week. I would leave my cell at 4:00 a.m., go to the bakery, work in the bakery until 4:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon, go from there to school and then get out of school at 9:00. Somewhere in that time I had to sit down in the corner somewhere while the rest of the guys were playing cards or whatever during their break times, and study, and that was not easy for me.
I remember I was probably 18 or 19 and had a couple of years in already, and one of the older guys came to me at Comstock and said, “I don’t know if you know it Sean, but there is a youth group here where the local teenagers come into the prison once a month and there’s a few of us that are cleared through the prison and we go down and we talk to them about prison life and drugs and alcohol and second chances and decisions.” They wanted me to be involved, and I said, “Oh no.” I said, “I can’t even help myself, how am I possibly going to help these kids?” The guy said, “Oh no, we’re not asking; it’s Monday at 6:00, we’ll see you there.” So I went down there and really, for me, it wasn’t about helping anybody else. I was surviving literally under the wing of these guys, so I was going to show up because they said to and that was it. I never thought about what I was going to say. I was the last guy to speak and the first couple of guys spoke about drugs and alcohol and choices and education, and they got to me and I started to speak about what it was like for my family for me to go to prison. I remember walking out of there and everybody was crying and Al who was about 6’4”, about 280 pounds, said, “Sean, that was brilliant.” I said, “I didn’t do it on purpose; I don’t know where it came from.”

Every one of the men and women that have been through Hudson Link college programs and are now home, are in the Social Services field. They’re Service Coordinators, they’re Case Workers, HIV/AIDS Outreach Coordinators. They’re helpers, so they’re going back to communities that they had once hurt, but now as helpers. It’s very empowering for them, and it’s very beneficial for the younger generation that sees a very tough group of people returning back to the community, but instead of coming back as tough guys, they’re coming back as healers, as helpers, and instead of carrying weapons, they’re carrying textbooks. Many of them have gone back for graduate degrees, so now they’re home and they’re continuing. We have a very powerful message, but it’s an unusual message.
Prison to Provider

Answer the questions below based on the Hudson Link narratives.

1. Describe three things that Andre and Sean have in common, according to the articles.

2. Why do you think Andre and Sean chose to work in the Social Services sector?

3. The article mentions that most Hudson Link graduates go on to have careers in Social Services. Why do you think that is?

4. How do you think Sean’s or Andre’s experiences could benefit a Social Service organization?

5. If you were Sean or Andre applying for their current position, how would you talk about your incarceration history in a way that might encourage an employer to hire you?
From Community Organizing to Entrepreneurship

Students read an interview with a barber who uses skills she developed as a community organizer to create positive hair cutting experiences for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender non-conforming customers. She uses her own negative experiences as a queer woman in barbershops to create a safe and positive experience for her clients. Students write a personal reflection about a time they were mistreated, then read and discuss the barber’s narrative. Guidelines for facilitating respectful discussions around sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are included, although entrepreneurism is the focus of the activity.

PREP

- Read the article, Interview: Dez Marshall, Barber and anticipate any questions or struggles that students might have.
- Write the following questions on the board:
  - Where were you?
  - How old were you?
  - Who else was there?
  - What happened that made you feel unwelcome or mistreated?
  - Why do you think you were treated this way?
  - What could someone—either someone who was there in real life or someone who you imagine being there—have done to have made the situation better?

MATERIALS

- Interview: Dez Marshall, Barber article
DISCUSS

1. Write the term **Community Organizer** on the board and ask students to explain what they think it means. Write their ideas on the board and clarify.

   - Community organizers help people with a common social problem work together to address the problem. Community organizers might help tenants work to secure better living conditions or help parents work to secure better conditions for their children at school. They often work to get many community members involved and may work with legislators, politicians or managers of various sorts.

2. What skills do you think Community Organizers need to have or develop on the job?

   - Excellent verbal and written communication skills, cultural sensitivity, the ability to earn people's trust, use non-judgmental language, public speaking skills, teaching and training skills, problem-solving and conflict resolution skills.

3. How do you think these skills might help a Community Organizer enter a different field?

   - Most jobs require good communication, problem-solving, conflict resolution skills and the ability to earn trust from others.

4. We’re going to read an article about someone who used the skills she developed as a community organizer to open her own business as a barber. What does Community Organizing have to do with giving haircuts? Dez wanted her clients to feel welcomed and accepted in her barber chair, and she used the skills she had cultivated in Community Organizing to achieve this. She has become so successful that several articles have been written about her.

   Before we read, you’re going to reflect on your own experiences. Take out a piece of paper and write about a time you felt excluded. It can be a time you were mistreated, discriminated against, unwelcome or denied something that you felt you deserved. Reflect on your experience of the events and write 2-3 paragraphs that answer the questions on the board, being as descriptive as possible.

5. Ask if students would like to share what they wrote about, not reading from their reflection, but summarizing it. This is a personal and potentially sensitive assignment, so if students do not feel comfortable sharing, move on to the next step.
6 Distribute *Interview: Dez Marshall, Barber*. Ask students to annotate it, by underlining and taking notes on why Dez made a career change and what steps she took to make the change.

7 Discuss the following questions as a class:

- What is the main idea of the article?
- What career change did Dez make and why did she make it?
- How did her personal experiences inform her career choices?
- What skills do you think she uses at work?
- What steps did she take to enter her current field? What additional steps is she planning to take?
- Several articles were written about her. Why do you think that is?
- Do you think Dez will be successful in her new career? Why or why not?
- Would you like to get a haircut by her? Why or why not?
Interview: Dez Marshall, Barber

Written by Anita Dolce Vita

Adapted from http://www.dapperq.com/2015/02/interview-queer-cuts-with-dez-marshall-at-nelsons-barber-shop/
Photos by Tiph Browne

DAPPERQ: Tell our readers a bit about yourself and Nelson's Barber Shop.

DEZ: Nelson's Barbershop is located in Flatbush, Brooklyn. The shop has been in the neighborhood for over 25 years. The current owner, Nelson, has worked there since he was 18, when it was under a different name. He took over approximately 20 years ago. The shop is well known in the neighborhood. It's an institution really. Most guys have been going there their whole lives and once they have their own kids, they start bringing them in too. There's a client who moved to Virginia some years ago. He still comes to Brooklyn about once a month for a cut. He isn't an exception—he is the norm. Barber loyalty is important. Once you find the right barber, not even state lines can keep you apart.

Nelson's is primarily a space for men of color. We were voted the Best Place in NYC to Get a Fade or Shave by the Village Voice in 2014. We welcome anyone, regardless of gender expression or race, but Flatbush itself is primarily made up of people of color communities. But even before I started working there, Nelson's Barbershop had a good sized female clientele. Like almost any other barbershop, we talk sports, movies, politics, current events and women. As a queer1 woman of color, my opinion is usually very different from others in the shop. We disagree a lot, but I appreciate the honesty. A barbershop is one of the few places that (mostly) men gather and have very honest conversations. It's cool to be a part of those conversations.

I have been a barber at Nelson's since April 2014, but have been cutting hair for about 6 years. I was a community organizer after graduating college. I worked at FIERCE, which organizes queer youth of color. I worked a lot of hours. I didn't always have the money for a cut and definitely didn't have time to go to a barber.

I also had a lot of issues with barbers I did try: they would ask why I wanted to look like a boy, if I wanted “the lesbian haircut” (I still have no clue what this means), or they would ask really invasive questions about my sex life. I eventually found a barber who treated me with respect. Unfortunately, he always cut my skin when he gave me a shape-up, so I would have a scab along my hairline. Eventually I bought my own pair of Wahl clippers and gave myself caesars. I realized that my peers probably had

1 Queer is an umbrella term that refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and other people who do not conform to traditional ideas of what men and women should look like. While it has historically been used as an offensive slur against LGBTQ people, it has been reclaimed by the people who were once victimized by it as a way of showing strength and pride.
similar experiences, so I started to offer free
haircuts to them in exchange for participation
in meetings, actions, workshops, etc.
Eventually, I transitioned out of that field. In
January 2014, I went to the American Barber
Institute (ABI), received my Apprentice
License, and began working at Nelson's. In the
next few months I plan to take my practical
exam to receive my Master Barber license.
I want to learn the business side of owning and
operating a barbershop. My end goal is to own
my own shop to serve as a safe space for queer
guys to get really dope cuts.

I began offering house and office visits shortly
after starting at ABI. I made a flyer, then
created a better one and started posting on
Facebook and passing out flyers at clubs and in
Union Square. I wasn't sure when I would find a
chair. The barber industry is very much a boys'
club. I've been at Nelson's for almost a year
and still get men who look at me in disbelief
that I am indeed a barber. When I first started,
some customers would throw insults, saying I
wasn't a real barber, or that they would never
trust a woman to cut their hair. I knew I needed
to develop my clientele before I ever started
to rent a chair. And I knew I wanted to cater
to the queer community, because that is my
community. I kept thinking about when I was
looking for a barber, and about the experiences
my peers shared with me over the years. We
should never be in a situation where we have
to prove our humanity. But that's how I felt
in a barber chair: That I had to prove I was
worthy of service. I didn't come to the shop for
your amusement or to satisfy your curiosity. I
came for a caesar and shape-up. I knew when I
decided to pursue this industry that that would
be my hallmark: I will give you a dope cut in
a safe space without any judgment of your
gender expression or gender identity. For many
people, their safe space is their home. And
being welcomed into that space is something
I take very seriously. I started offering cuts to
those who can open their office as well. Being
at a shop offers some levels of convenience, but
some people can't make it to the shop, others
want to respect it as a primarily men of color
space, others really like the convenience of
going to a cut in their home. I try to meet the
needs of many folks. They contact me primarily
through email to set up appointments at
the shop or for house/office visits. They also
message me on Facebook. I do house calls on
my days off—Mondays and Tuesdays. House
visits are slightly more expensive than the cuts
at the shop in order to cover the travel costs.

DAPPERQ: Do you get many queer customers
at Nelson's?
DEZ: Living true to my intention of creating
a safe experience for queer and trans folks,
I've focused my outreach and advertising to
these customers as my primary base. I started
by utilizing my personal Facebook page to
support this targeted outreach and then moved
to advertising on queer groups on FB, like
Queer Exchange and The QTPOC Exchange.
I received a bulk of my queer and trans clients
this way. While my clientele isn't exclusively
queer and trans, the majority of them are.
Working as a Community Organizer for all those years gives me an advantage that other barbers might not have. As an organizer, your greatest tool is the ability to create strong relationships; actively listening and engaging with people in an authentic way. I definitely bring that to my game as a barber. I listen to my client, not just about the cut they want, but what goes on in their life. Sometimes the conversation is surface: how was your day, are you a fan of whatever team is playing on the TV, how deep is your love for Beyoncé, etc. but many times it gets deep: How was it when you came out to family and friends? What are your thoughts on the movement around police brutality? etc. It lets me connect with my clients. It’s an intimate relationship. Some of Nelson’s clients have been going to him for 20 years. They trust him with a lot of personal info about their lives, family, work, etc. As a barber, you are a sort of life coach; people tell you things and want your advice. Other times they just want to be heard. My experience as an Organizer applies so much to my role as a barber. It’s not about having the answers to everyone’s problems; it’s about listening and helping them reach the solution themselves. And while they are doing that, helping them look hotter than when they came into the shop. So not only do they feel better because they got something off their chest, or maybe even have a solution to an issue, they look in the mirror and feel good because their haircut is dope.

My role is to support my clients in being their full selves. I do that by giving them the haircut they want and treating them with the respect they deserve. I am not sure if that really makes me any different from other barbers, because I think we all do that. But many times, when the barber is not queer and the client is, the treatment changes. The simple act of getting a haircut becomes an intimidating experience. Getting a haircut should be an enjoyable experience. Not one you fear. I reassure people one haircut at a time.

**DapperQ:** What are your rates?

**Dez:** Nelson’s Barbershop is affordable, despite the rapid gentrification going on in Flatbush. Our cuts start at $15 cash; a haircut and a shave are $20. My housecall prices start at $20. I provide all the same services in your home that we provide at the shop. As a barber, I specialize in shorter styles: fades, caesars, baldies, undercuts, mohawks, shape-ups. I do a lot of pixie cuts. Barbers aren’t trained the same way hairstylists are, so I am not able to style longer hair yet. If you just need a trim for maintenance, I got you. I also do some design work. I am still learning the ropes of designs, but the more I do it the better I will be. •

If people want to see my cuts, they can visit my fan page on Facebook at: facebook.com/dezisdope
Discussion Guidelines

The following guidelines can help maintain a respectful and productive learning environment for all, especially useful in discussing topics that may be difficult for some.

- As you prepare to teach this activity, consider: When you read the article and imagine teaching it, what concerns, if any, arise? How comfortable are you discussing LGBTQ issues? What conscious or unconscious bias might you have? Have you ever discussed LGBTQ issues with students? Have you discussed other potential “hot button” topics?

- If you feel uncertain about or uncomfortable with terms often used to describe LGBTQ communities, refer to the glossary at the end of this activity, provided by GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network.

- Assume that there are students in the class who identify as LGBTQ or have close friends or family members who do.

- Some students may not have had public discussions about LGBTQ issues before and may be uncomfortable expressing their ideas. Accept that some students may inadvertently make offensive comments, or may be uncomfortable with various terms or concepts. Acknowledge that students are taking risks in communicating their ideas effectively and respectfully. Show them that no one will be punished for missteps. This is a learning environment.

- You are responsible for maintaining a respectful classroom environment. Be prepared to address derogatory statements or gestures in a way that educates and makes all students feel heard and seen. Do not let them go unaddressed. This shows that you support LGBTQ students and allies, and that you support all students in their learning processes. Any intervention should be respectful to students and present a learning opportunity. Some useful phrases include:
  - General questioning techniques, such as: “What makes you say that?”
  - Questions addressing specific language: “How could you rephrase that in a more respectful way?”
  - As a last resort: “That’s not appropriate here.”

- Guide students away from looking to LGBTQ or gender-nonconforming students as an authority on gender or sexuality issues. No one should feel they are expected to speak on behalf of others in their communities.

- Keep the focus of the activity on community organizing, entrepreneurism and careers.

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DID YOU KNOW?

Many CUNY offices are designated “Safe Zones” for LGBTQ students identified by a triangle rainbow sticker. Safe Zone staff have undergone training to help LGBTQ students feel safe and welcome.
Glossary of LGBT-Related Terms

The glossary is designed to provide basic definitions of words and phrases commonly used in discussions about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and related issues. All language is constantly evolving; new terms are introduced, while others fade from use or change their meaning over time. This remains true for the following terms and definitions. For terms that refer to people’s identities, people must self-identify for these terms to be appropriately used to describe them.

- **Ableism**: A system of oppression that benefits able-bodied people at the expense of people with disabilities.

- **Ally**: A member of the majority or dominant group who works to end oppression by recognizing their own privilege and supporting or advocating for the oppressed population. For example, a straight cisgender person who supports and stands up for the equality of LGBT people.

- **Asexual**: A person who does not experience sexual attraction, but may experience other forms of attraction (e.g., intellectual, emotional). Asexual people may also identify as “bisexual,” “gay,” “lesbian,” “pansexual,” “queer,” “straight,” and many more.

- **Bisexual**: A person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to two genders. For example, a person attracted to some male-identified people and some female-identified people.

- **Cisgender**: A person whose gender identity and expression are aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth.

- **Classism**: A system of oppression that benefits people with high and middle socioeconomic status at the expense of people with lower socioeconomic status.

- **Coming Out**: The ongoing process that an LGBT person goes through, to recognize their own identities pertaining to sexual orientation and/or gender identity and gender expression, and to be open about them with others.

- **Dyke**: A derogatory term directed at a person perceived as a lesbian. It is oftentimes used against women who are gender nonconforming, with the assumption being that their gender nonconformity implies a sexual attraction to women. Many lesbians (of all gender-expressions) have reclaimed the term and use it as an affirming label with which to identify.

- **Fag/Faggot**: A derogatory term directed at a person perceived as a gay man. It is oftentimes used against men who are gender nonconforming, with the assumption being that their gender nonconformity implies a sexual attraction to men.

- **Gay**: A person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to some members of the same gender. “Gay” often refers to a male-identified person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to some other males. “Gay” should not be used as an umbrella term to refer to all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people; the term “LGBT” is more accurate and inclusive.

- **Gender**: A set of cultural identities, expressions and roles — codified as feminine or masculine — that are assigned to people, based upon the interpretation of their bodies, and more specifically, their sexual and reproductive anatomy. Since gender is a social construction, it is possible to reject or modify the assignment made, and develop something that feels truer and just to oneself.

Download PDF: https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/GLSEN%20Safe%20Space%20Kit%202016_0.pdf

Source: GLSEN Safe Space Kit 2016, pp. 40-42
**Gender Binary:** A socially constructed system of viewing gender as consisting solely of two categories, “male” and “female,” in which no other possibilities for gender are believed to exist. The gender binary is inaccurate because it does not take into account the diversity of gender identities and gender expressions among all people. The gender binary is oppressive to anyone that does not conform to dominant societal gender norms.

**Gender Expression:** The multiple ways (e.g., behaviors, dress) in which a person may choose to communicate gender to oneself and/or to others.

**Gender Identity:** How an individual identifies in terms of their gender. Gender identities may include, “male,” “female,” “androgynous,” “transgender,” “genderqueer” and many others, or a combination thereof.

**Genderism:** A system of oppression that benefits cisgender people at the expense of transgender and gender nonconforming people. Genderism may take the form of Transphobia, bias and discrimination towards transgender and gender nonconforming people.

**Gender Nonconforming or Gender Variant:** A person who has a gender identity and/or gender expression that does not conform to the gender they were assigned at birth. People who identify as “gender nonconforming” or “gender variant” may or may not also identify as “transgender.”

**Genderqueer:** A person who has a gender identity and/or gender expression that does not conform to the gender they were assigned at birth. People who identify as “genderqueer” may or may not also identify as “transgender.”

**Heterosexism:** A system of oppression that benefits straight/heterosexual people at the expense of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Heterosexism may take the form of Homophobia or Biphobia, bias and discrimination towards lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

**Homosexual:** A person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to some members of the same gender. Many people prefer the terms “lesbian” or “gay,” instead.

**Identity:** Identity is how we understand ourselves, what we call ourselves and often who we connect to and associate with. Each of us has a unique diversity of social identities based on our sexual orientation, gender identity, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion and other important parts of who we are. Those identities develop over time, intersect with each other and help give meaning to our lives. Below, you’ll find many common terms that people use to identify themselves, especially in relation to their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. It’s important to remember that these terms are about self-identification; no one can tell anyone else how to identify or what terms to use.

**Intersex:** An umbrella term used to describe a variety of conditions in which a person is born with reproductive and/or sexual anatomy that doesn’t seem to fit the medical definitions of female or male.

**Lesbian:** A person who is female-identified and who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to some other females.

**LGBT or LGBTQ:** An umbrella term referring to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender. Sometimes the acronym is written as LGBTQ, with the “Q” referring to those who identify as queer and/or questioning. The acronym can also include additional letters, in reference to other identities that do not conform to dominant societal norms around sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.
**Oppression:** Systems of power and privilege, based on bias, which benefit some social groups over others. Oppression can 1) take many forms, including ideological, institutional, interpersonal and internalized; 2) be intentional and unintentional; 3) be conscious and unconscious; and 4) be visible and invisible. Oppression prevents the oppressed groups and individuals from being free and equal. Many people face oppression based on more than one of their identities, creating a unique complexity of challenges and resilience.

**Pansexual:** A person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to some people, regardless of their gender identity.

**Person of Color:** A person who identifies as African-American/Black, Latino/Hispanic, Native American/First Nation, Asian and Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern and/or having mixed ancestry may also identify as a “Person of Color.”

**Preferred Gender Pronouns (PGPs):** The pronoun or set of pronouns that a person would like others to call them by, when their proper name is not being used. Traditional examples include “she/her/hers” or “he/him/his.” Some people prefer gender-neutral pronouns, such as “ze/hir/hirs,” “zie/zir/zirs,” “ey/em/eirs,” “per/per/pers,” “hu/hum/hus,” or “they/them/ theirs.” Some people prefer no pronouns at all.

**Queer:** An umbrella term used to describe a sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression that does not conform to dominant societal norms. While it is used as a neutral, or even a positive term among many LGBT people today, historically “queer” was used as a derogatory slur.

**Questioning:** A person who is in the process of understanding and exploring what their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and gender expression might be.

**Racism:** A system of oppression that benefits white people at the expense of people of color.

**Reclaimed Words:** As language evolves, some individuals and communities choose to identify with terms that had previously been used as slurs against them. The words are “reclaimed” and given new meaning, often imbued with a sense of pride and resilience. Examples include, “queer,” “dyke,” and “tranny,” among others. It’s important to remember that identity is unique to each individual; not all members of a community readily accept the use of reclaimed words, as they may still find them offensive and hurtful.

**Sexism:** A system of oppression that benefits male-identified people at the expense of female-identified people.

**Sexual Orientation:** The inner feelings of who a person is attracted to emotionally and/or physically, in relation to their own gender identity. Some people may identify as “asexual,” “bisexual,” “gay,” “lesbian,” “pansexual,” “straight,” and many more.

**Straight or Heterosexual:** A person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to some members of another gender (specifically, a male-identified person who is attracted to some females or a female-identified person who is attracted to some males).

**Tranny:** A derogatory term directed at a transgender person. Some transgender people have reclaimed the term and use it as an affirming label with which to identify.

**Transgender:** A person whose gender identity and/or expression are not aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth. “Transgender” is often used as an umbrella term encompassing a large number of identities related to gender nonconformity.
Language to Leverage Your Personal Experience in Community and Social Services

Students use context clues to determine the meaning of terms used in resumes, cover letters and interviews, then answer questions and write original sentences using the new terms.

PREP

- Be prepared to explain the word *stigma* and the terms on the *Key Terms* worksheet included in this activity.

MATERIALS

- *Key Terms for Resumes, Cover Letters and Interviews* worksheet
- *Definitions of Key Terms for Resumes, Cover Letters and Interviews* handout

EXPLAIN

1. Many alums of the Hudson Link prison college degree programs have become successional Social Services professionals, but getting hired wasn’t necessarily easy. It wasn’t only their skills and credentials that got them their jobs. It was also the way they described themselves, their abilities and their potential to make meaningful contributions, despite the stigma of their history of incarceration.

2. Today we are going to practice using vocabulary that you can use to describe your strengths regardless of the profession you want to pursue and regardless of the challenges you may have overcome in your past. Credentials, such as certificates, licenses and degrees are important, but first impressions also make a huge impact. The way you describe yourself in writing, in your resume and cover letter, determines whether or not you are called for an interview. And the way you describe yourself during an interview can determine whether or not you are offered the job. Using professional language correctly makes an enormous positive impact. It shows that you are professional, educated and have taken time to carefully consider the words you choose to describe yourself. Since every employee of an organization becomes a representative of that organization, your professionalism will make the
organization look good. Having a professional vocabulary also helps you speak with confidence about yourself and when you have confidence in yourself and your abilities, others will believe in you too.

3. Distribute *Key Terms for Resumes, Cover Letters and Interviews* and ask students to work on Parts I and II in pairs.

4. When students are finished, have them discuss their answers as a class. Clarify students’ understanding of the vocabulary and offer additional information from *Definitions of Key Terms for Resumes, Cover Letters and Interviews* handout.

5. After the discussion, distribute the *Definitions* handout to students and ask them to complete Part III of the worksheet on their own in class or for homework.
Key Terms for Resumes, Cover Letters and Interviews

PART 1: For each word, read the sentence and try to determine the meaning of the underlined vocabulary word from the context. Explain the meaning in your own words.

1 Asset
At first I thought I should hide the fact that I am a recovering drug user when applying for jobs, but actually it is seen as an asset in my work as an Alcohol and Drug Counselor.

Meaning of the word: ____________________________

2 Benefit
It's taken me many years working as personal trainer to realize that sharing the story of my struggle with obesity can be a benefit to clients.

Meaning of the word: ____________________________

3 Identify
I have a hard time identifying with my clients with eating disorders, but sharing experiences of similar struggle isn’t required to be a good social service provider. In those moments when I have trouble relating, I rely on the training I received in school, and it helps me build a trusting relationship, even though I haven’t gone through what my clients have.

Meaning of the word: ____________________________

4 Overcome
Even though I work mostly one-on-one with clients in my job as a health coach, I do also teach workshops in the community, so I've had to overcome my fear of speaking in public.

Meaning of the word: ____________________________
5 **Experience**

My *experience* with depression has forced me to be very organized about doing what I need to do to stay healthy, such as taking my medications daily, eating on a schedule, exercising regularly and getting 8 hours of sleep a night.

Meaning of the word: ____________________________

______________________________

6 **Perceive**

As an older person re-entering the workforce, I highlight my computer skills on my resume, since some people *perceive* older workers as not being very computer savvy.

Meaning of the word: ____________________________

______________________________

7 **Validate**

I work at a long-term supportive housing organization for formerly homeless populations. Many of the clients have mental illnesses. Some of them are very anxious and nervous, paranoid even. When a client yells at me, feels threatened, or even accuses me of things I haven’t done, it can be hard to *validate* them and their experiences, but it’s part of the job, and helps build trust over time.

Meaning of the word: ____________________________

______________________________

8 **Recover**

I received money from Medicaid as a paid family caregiver while I stayed home from work for 6 weeks helping my mother *recover* from her hip surgery.

Meaning of the word: ____________________________

______________________________
9 Challenge

Just because I am a survivor of domestic violence doesn’t mean I automatically know what my clients at the domestic violence shelter are going through. It can be a challenge to not make assumptions about their experiences.

*Meaning of the word:*


10 Empathize

You don’t need to have experienced something similar to your client to be able to empathize with them.

*Meaning of the word:*


PART II: Answer the following questions using complete sentences. Make sure to use the vocabulary word in your answer.

1. What do you consider to be your most important workplace asset and why?

2. What are some possible benefits of disclosing a difficult past to potential employers?

3. What is a potential downside to identifying too much with a client?

4. Describe something that you have had to overcome in order to be a better employee, student or caregiver.

5. How can you discuss your own past experiences with a client while keeping the conversation about them, not you?
6. Describe a time when you were perceived in a way that you felt was inaccurate. Why do you think you came across that way?

7. What are some ways of making a person feel validated?

8. Describe why it is important for social service providers to recover (or take steps to recover) from a trauma before addressing a similar trauma in their clients.

9. Describe a challenge you have overcome that you think would help you get a job in Social Services.

10. Describe how you can empathize with someone whose experiences are very different from your own.
# Definitions of Key Terms for Resumes, Cover Letters and Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asset</td>
<td>A positive quality (or thing) that can be used to someone’s advantage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Being bilingual is an asset to many New York job-seekers.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit</td>
<td>A good or helpful result of something.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The NYCID benefits New Yorkers because it grants free memberships to many museums in addition to being a form of identification.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify</td>
<td>To have something in common with or be able to relate to a person or experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Social workers must try to have patience and understanding for all of their clients, even the ones with whom they might not identify.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcome</td>
<td>To succeed in moving past a challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Many people can overcome their addiction to smoking with the proper support.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>To go through something, an event or period in which something specific occurs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Support groups can help people overcome difficult experiences by talking with others who have experienced similar situations.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceive</td>
<td>Coming to a conclusion about a person, place or event, based on one’s experience of it through the senses—seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and/or feeling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>People perceived her as being outgoing, even though she was really quite shy.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validate</td>
<td>To make someone feel heard and understood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Being able to validate a client's concerns is a key skill required of many Community and Social Service workers.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recover (from)</td>
<td>To restore one's health or well-being, such as after an illness, accident or trauma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>It can take many months of physical therapy to recover from a bad car accident and a lifetime to recover from an addiction.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>A physically, mentally or emotionally difficult experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>It is a challenge for most students to balance school, work and family responsibilities.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathize</td>
<td>To be able to understand another person's feelings of struggle. To be able to imagine what another person is going through as they experience a challenging time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>It is hard to truly help someone in need if you do not empathize with them and their situation.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PART III: Write one sentence using each of the vocabulary terms that you could say to an employer during an interview. The sentence should demonstrate your knowledge of the word.

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

6. 

7. 

8. 

9. 

10. 

Role Plays: Crafting and “Pitching” Your Story of Employable Qualities

Students brainstorm qualities that Community and Social Service employers look for in new hires. They then select three qualities from the list that they themselves possess. They identify the real-life challenges that led them to develop these qualities. They then role play job interviews, describing their skills born from overcoming challenges, using the terms practiced in the previous activity.

MATERIALS

- Definitions of Key Terms for Resumes, Cover Letters and Interviews handout from previous activity

EXPLAIN

1. Some Community and Social Service providers hold degrees or certifications from educational programs that prepare them for their jobs. Other jobs in the industry do not require formal credentials. Regardless of having training or not, what are some characteristics that Community and Social Service employers look for in new hires? Divide the class into groups of four and ask each group to brainstorm these qualities on one piece of paper.

   > Patience, empathy, good listening, clear communication, public speaking, resourcefulness, problem solving, conflict resolution.

2. Ask groups to share their responses and write the qualities on the board.

3. If students have done the previous activity, ask them to take out the Key Terms for Resumes, Cover Letters and Interviews. If not, distribute it now. Ask them to write on a separate piece of paper three qualities that they themselves possess from the list on the board. For each quality, they should write a paragraph describing a challenge they overcame or are currently facing that led them to develop the quality. Each paragraph should use one or more terms from the worksheet. This is an opportunity for students to practice using the terms in relation to their own employability, to craft their own personal narratives they can use during job interviews.
Examples of challenges leading to employable qualities could include: Growing up with five siblings leading to developing patience; or emigrating to the United States leading to developing resourcefulness.

4 Students should review their paragraphs and prepare to “pitch” themselves to a classmate playing the role of a potential employer.

5 Students should get into pairs with one student playing the role of a potential employer and the other playing the role of themselves as a job applicant. Together, the pair should decide on what the job is and who the interviewer is, for example, Are they the person the job applicant would report to? Are they a supervisor? An Executive Director?

6 The interviewer should begin the interview by asking questions that can help him or her learn about the applicant. The job applicant should describe themselves using the qualities they wrote about, explaining why they would be a good candidate for the job. They have 90 seconds to make a great impression. The interviewer should ask at least three of the following follow-up questions, or others that are relevant during the course of the conversation.

- Tell me more about __________________________.
- What was difficult about ________________________?
- How did you improve ____________________________?
- What steps did you take to overcome __________________?
- How will you build trust and connect with clients?
- What makes you a good community or social service provider?
- What are some workplace skills you are still working on?

7 Students should switch roles and repeat the activity, so that both students have the opportunity to play the employer and the interviewee. If time allows, students should “pitch” themselves several times, making any necessary refinements. The teacher should decide how many times to repeat the process, and when students should switch roles from employer to applicant and vice versa. In addition to practicing presenting themselves and their strengths, this is a good listening activity for those playing the role of employer. They need to listen and ask appropriate follow-up questions.
Success isn’t about how much money you make, it’s about the difference you make in people’s lives.

—Michelle Obama

Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama (born January 17, 1964) is an American lawyer and writer who was First Lady of the United States from 2009 to 2017. She is married to the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama, and was the first African-American First Lady. Raised on the South Side of Chicago, Illinois, Obama is a graduate of Princeton University and Harvard Law School, and spent her early legal career working at the law firm Sidley Austin, where she met her husband. She subsequently worked as the Associate Dean of Student Services at the University of Chicago and the Vice President for Community and External Affairs of the University of Chicago Medical Center. Barack and Michelle married in 1992 and have two daughters.

Adapted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michelle_Obama