

Interview Transcript

Katrina:

Alright so. Can you introduce yourself, name, age, anything you'd like to include that or things that you find relevant?

Ezra:

Yes, I am Ezra. I am 21. And I run the queer soup night event in CU.

Katrina:

And so when did you start getting involved with queer organizations?

Ezra:

In the summer of 2022, I noticed that there weren't a lot of queer events, and I wanted to start one so. I just. I decided to cook some soup, try and get word out and I brought some soup to a park and invited people there.

Katrina:

That's awesome. Can you elaborate on what happened after that, how things started going after you started that?

Ezra:

Well, it went pretty well. Our first event we had 10 attendees, I think. And our largest event I didn't keep track of, but I think we had maybe 60, so we had. So. Some logistics are I use Google forms. I get word out initially it was just through, mostly through discord servers campus queer discord servers. These days also the Uniting Pride discord server. I reach out to Uniting Pride and they will let me use their Instagram. They will put they will signal boost, they call it. I also we also have a sub stack, an e-mail list. And so we started out at Illini Grove, a park on campus.

Katrina:

Yeah I know the place, it's a cool place.

Ezra:

So we started there and then it was going to get too cold. So we moved to the Red Herring restaurant. And we were there that winter. Then we moved to the Women's Resource Center on campus, and then we were there from April to like August or something. Then we switched around venues a couple times and there's another event in a week that's about to be at the Phillips' Recreation Center.

Katrina:

Yeah, I saw the. I saw the message sent for that, in the Belegarth server, it looks cool. So I guess what has the experience for you been like starting this? And working with it.

Ezra:

It's definitely out of my comfort zone, but and it's definitely. There's a lot of logistics involved, but it's fun. I like cooking, so cooking the soup that's alright. And hosting the event is, that's definitely. It's been educational. I've had to. It's good to know how to be a host, how to be like around that many people being. Like, yeah, just running an event and coordinating with venues and. Other partners, artists and people that that's always challenging, but. Just. It's just another step in there. But it's always really nice at the actual event to see people just hanging out and maybe meeting each other, and that's- and sharing food.

Katrina:

Fair enough. It does sound like a very fun way to connect. Have you found that- so you said you started in 2022, correct? That would have been close to around when COVID is just letting up or such?

Ezra:

Something like that. Yeah. And so it's good that we had the event outdoors to begin with. We have it outdoors whenever we can. It just depends on the weather.

Katrina:

Fair enough. Have you found that something like COVID that's not been very helpful to any communities locally and especially queer ones, has impacted your event at all?

Ezra:

Yes, one soup night event we had to cancel because someone in my household got a COVID risk, and we've definitely there's been times where it's especially when the students come back to town we, we move it. Just this past August we were like, OK, we can't have this inside. We cancelled with the Women's Resource Center and moved it back to Illini Grove.

Katrina:

It sounds like you have been smarter than some organizations we've had here on campus. So you said that you've partnered with other people while working with your soup nights and what, what has that been like? Like you mentioned on your Uniting Pride?

Ezra:

So. So the first organization we partnered with was the Red Herring. That was useful because the most useful thing is when people have social media and they can spread the word, that's always nice. So but yeah, we rented their space. We briefly partnered with the- or attempted to partner with the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center. They didn't end up getting back to us on that. And yeah, uniting pride has been signal boosting our event. So sometimes if we get it, if we tell them in time they'll put it on their newsletter, they'll spread it on their Instagram. I think their Facebook also. And yeah, they just. They have a wide reach around here. I also briefly partnered with the LGBTQ Kiki, RSO and so they were able to help me just put up posters, so a lot of this is just they help with the advertising.

Katrina:

Fair enough. It sounds like that's, those are useful groups to partner with.

Katrina:

How's. So you've mentioned that there are different parts of the, the experience, the favorite part you mentioned that you like getting to see people, getting to make this soup. Are there parts that you would say are favorite parts least favorite parts, struggles you've had to overcome with it.

Ezra:

Well, I enjoy cooking the soup. Soup night's gotten a lot easier since I got a co-host, so it's my friend and I cook, cook the soup that takes a few hours there. So it's basically that whole day is soup day. It's challenge. It's just. It's just complicated to send emails back and forth, coordinate things. It's been, so that's always hard. It's been hard to like, try and get funding, especially working with when we were in the Women's Resource Center, they didn't even want us to have a tip jar that was hard. So it's been hard to fund it. I work at a vegetable farm, so I get a lot of the soup ingredients for free, so that makes it possible. It was just. It's been very hard to find a venue that works.

Katrina:

So can you elaborate more on the struggles that you've had with funding stuff like. I imagine that you're one of the people hosting this, so. How, how do you end getting funding then if I may ask?

Ezra:

It is just out of pocket, myself and my co-host pay for it. And we use free venues whenever we can. We use free ingredients whenever we can. We do have a Ko-fi virtual tip jar and this coming soup night we will have a physical tip jar as well and there have been very kind people who have donated some money to us. Donated a few dollars here and there and that really helps a lot.

Katrina:

That sounds helpful. Can you elaborate on, you mentioned that you like seeing people during, on the soup nights that there's kind of a community around it. Can you elaborate more on what that's like, what the general atmosphere is like?

Ezra:

Yeah. So we try to set up the seating so that it's not just individual tables, so that it's longer tables. So people don't just sit with the people they came with. Maybe they interact with people beyond that. So. So we tried to make. We try to help people meet each other and there have definitely been. There's always people who, like, are meeting each other. Having those conversations for the first time. There's definitely groups of friends who come. It's just, it gets to be very lively. There's a lot of conversation. And there's some regulars. There's people who come every time or just there's a lot of faces I see around town who I know because of soup

night and there's people who recognize me because of soup night, people who I assume recognize like each other. It just helps people to meet each other. And that's, that's the goal.

Katrina:

It is awesome to hear that you have formed a community around this. I am curious because you mention that you've partnered with other groups and stuff before. Does that affect that at all? Is there ever like crossovers between communities or how's that?

Ezra:

Conflict, did you say conflict?

Katrina:

Conflict or crossover or whatever you find relevant.

Ezra:

Yes, there's definitely crossover, so. We do try to advertise it beyond students, but a lot of our attendees are students for obvious reasons, but we try to make. Our reach has definitely expanded to more townies since we started partnering- since we started working with Uniting Pride, so that's been very helpful and we just we try to make events as accessible as we can just physically we try to make things accessible by bus. Problem with campus is that there's not very much parking, so that you know that it's difficult for people who drive. We're trying to make sure events are wheelchair accessible, COVID accessible whenever possible, although that is difficult. And we just try to, we try to make sure events are friendly to kids, one. With the Women's Resource Center they wanted to be especially careful and would not allow unaccompanied minors, but. It is, I think that it's really cool if this event can be a space also for teenagers or people. And so that's one thing we look for in a venue is one that allows all ages within reason.

Katrina:

Fair enough. You've mentioned having issues with, working with the Women's Resource Center a few times. Anything you want to elaborate about working with, experiences you've had with the group or you personally-

Ezra:

Well I just want to say that those small things are not entirely representative of the organization. It is really great to work with in general.

Katrina:

Yeah of course.

Ezra:

They're very good at emailing, very good at coordination. They have an elevator, which is great. They, it's just. It's a really great space. It's very accessible from a campus perspective. It's a very central location for students to get to. They have tables that can be easily moved around. I

just think they're doing great things in general also, and I'm very grateful that they let us use their space. For as long as they did.

Katrina:

Fair enough. I was not trying to poke at that or anything.

Ezra:

Of course. Just shout out to the Women's Resource Center.

Katrina:

Fair enough. I agree. They're pretty cool. So you mentioned that when you started it, you noticed that there was a lack of queer spaces in the general area. Could you perhaps elaborate on how you notice this or any other motivations behind starting Soup Night?

Ezra:

Well. Uh. Maybe there were just events that I wasn't aware of. I also wasn't a student at the time that I started soup night, but I wasn't seeing that many, like queer focused events around there was. Oh. There was Queer Wet Dreamz. The organization, they did a bunch of events at Skateland that I saw. I wasn't able to get to those because Skateland is in Savoy. But I also, I really, I care a lot about sharing food. I think sharing food is a really cool way to take. To care for a community, it was important to me that the event be free, and I had noticed there weren't many queer food based events around. And want to start one. That has been a challenge. One challenge finding a venue is there are not that many spaces that will allow you to serve food, especially hot food. So that's been a challenge. I've learned a lot about food safety laws. We're very careful about that.

Katrina:

Actually, could you elaborate more about that? Like what experiences you've had to take on or adjust to as you've started running an event like this.

Ezra:

With food safety?

Katrina:

Food safety or anything else really. It sounds like something that there would be a lot to learn to do that.

Ezra:

Yeah, so for food safety, we haven't like gotten any warnings or anything, but we cooked the soup in a home kitchen and so. But I have looked and we fall under a potluck law, which means that we are as long as it's generally understood that the soup is cooked in a home kitchen, which I think it is. We and, everything we just. We say like we cook the soup, you know it's not. But we. So as long as we're not, we cannot be in a venue that sells food at all, because that would be the, I guess, the reason behind that law is it's it would be misleading. So and we be

sure to, you know, obviously wash our hands, but we also have to have a crockpot. We have to keep, we need to keep the soup above a certain temperature. It also means that we have to have the soup on the weekend because we have to cook it the day of. I'm not very comfortable serving like reheated soup because soup and that quantity takes a really long time to cool down. So we have to have the event on a weekend because my co-host and I both worked on weekdays. And yeah, we've had to. There's just been different, like, accessibility things that have come up just. The Red Herring which we had been in, it's a basement location at the bottom of the staircase, which is difficult for people with wheelchairs. It's also difficult for carrying large pots of soup down there and just. Yeah, I've learned a lot about just emailing people. I also learned Photoshop for this, for designing posters. A lot of this has also been working with artists. So just a lot of coordination, a lot of emailing back and forth about when I can expect a poster or when I or with like venues, what the plan is for the day of what that setup will look like. Just to be clear on those.

Katrina:

Fair enough. You mentioned working with artists, how has that experience for you been any different from, like trying to work with groups like Uniting Pride or Women's Resource Center and all? Like, how do those experiences partnering with people differ for you?

Ezra:

Well, they're definitely different because those, the people I'm working with are individuals. And not part of an organization. So it's been, it's just it can be hard to get ahold of people hard to message people. We recently had to come up with a new poster very quickly because the artist ended up not being able to finish the poster. That should be simpler in the future since my co-host gained access to a drawing tablet and has very good art skills, and so I think we can make the posters in house from now on. But our first artist was a family friend, a friend of my sisters and of my family, who was excited about the event and drew us a beautiful poster and we actually. We've used that art as much as possible, and so we actually made, we made stickers.

Katrina:

Oh cool!

Ezra:

So. I actually have my laptop, here.

Katrina:

Oh, that's a cool sticker.

Ezra:

Yeah. So we're hoping to make more of those as soon as we can. Definitely having proximity to the university has been helpful. Sibel Center for design has sticker printing access and Grainger and campus priced printing is the cheapest in town for color printing, so this is this is a poster. I printed out the poster. And we hang those up around town. We put some stickers up around town, on lampposts, on things. I think the art is a really important part of it because

an event is great in words, but it needs to have something to catch people's eye and make them want to attend. So a lot of this I've learned about advertising, that type of thing.

Katrina:

Is that something? Where you just learned it gradually over time. Or is it something where you start deliberating looking for new ways you could branch out or pick up new skills.

Ezra:

Well, I don't think we started printing out posters until November. So it was happening from January until November without printed posters I believe. We got one template from the artist, the original artist who did the sticker that you saw, with that beautiful soup logo, and so this is why I learned Photoshop is because I ended up like changing the colors of the background and changing the text and just figuring out how to make a general poster. Changing the poster so it wasn't just for the monthly event, but for the event in general. We hung up a lot of copies of that poster, reformatting that into the sticker format, and we started doing that in that winter, so a little bit later on.

Katrina:

Ok. Well, congrats on picking up new skills. That's always fun. So you mentioned that you have a co-host now a few times. Is that someone who started the club with you or you met them in the club or the event. That started the event with you or you met them through or how did that come to be?

Ezra:

Well, they were my coworker at the time, and so I was talking about the event and they offered to help cook and we became friends, I think kind of through soup night as well. They weren't of entirely my host for the first little bit. They helped me cook this soup, which was huge, and lately they've taken on more of the, some, they've helped with the advertising, helped to the venue coordination. It's always just great to have another person to like, ask questions and ask for another opinion on some things that's really important and they also have beautiful art skills, as you saw. And so they've been very good to work with. I'm grateful to be working with them.

Katrina:

Yeah, fair enough. It sounds like it's definitely something where you want to have someone working with you to help make everything work.

Ezra:

Yes.

Katrina:

Out of curiosity, what does being the host of an event like this like, entail general like, task wise or just like. Time management on your end because you've also mentioned you're working, so I imagine it's a balance.

Ezra:

Yes, definitely. The hardest part is just finding time to advertise. Finding, just keeping on top of emails, keeping on top of talking to venues and artists, but being the host involved. So we cook the soup. We cook the soup, so we cut up all the vegetables. That always takes a long time when you're cooking soup in large quantities, I'd say the standard amount is for 30 or 40 people. Well, I guess, yeah, 20 to 40 people just depending and so we. That type of thing takes a long time to heat up. It takes a long time to come to a boil, so it just takes a really long time. And to cook it, it's it can be challenging to get the ingredients to just calculate, to do the math on how many ingredients you'll need based on the number of RSVP's you've got calculated for people who RSVP and then don't show up, or people who only found out about it the day of it's just always hard to correctly estimate the amount of soup. And just. So that's before the event and then we, we transport the soup to the event and set up. We make sure there's enough seating and yeah, that it's arranged as much as possible in, in more connected ways. And so we set up the event, we layout the soup we layout. There's typically bread. Sometimes we bring, we bring drinks like pop or lemonade. So and then people come and it's just a matter of making sure to welcome everyone and tell them like what the deal is that they should, that where the disposable bowls and spoons are, where the soup is, just like helping them get settled because people walk in and they're just not sure where to go. What's going on? So and just people, just to be there to answer questions, to help direct people even about basic things. Like where's the bathroom or oh we need to refill the water pitcher. And it's just a lot of, just talking to people making connections in, yeah.

Katrina:

Through connections like that is there anyone that perhaps like, besides you and your co-host helps you guys set stuff out or is it just normally you two setting things up and making sure things run well.

Ezra:

Often my sister will help come and help set up. She is also queer and a lot of the time near the end of the event people will just ask if there's any way they can help clean up. So usually we have a lot of help cleaning up at the end. Also, shout out to, there's a person in Women of Pride who was very helpful when we were in the Women's Resource Center to answer questions about that location. Thank you, Crystal. Because she was just very good at yeah, answering questions, directing people, helping coordinate, helping, making sure people were going to the right place and knew where to go.

Katrina:

I believe I know who you're talking about, yeah the interactions I've had with her, very awesome person.

Ezra:

Yeah, she's very cool.

Katrina:

Yeah. So since you've started the whole soup night thing is cooking, so you personally speaking is that something you've been like doing for a while was that like a hobby before you started up the soup thing. Or.

Ezra:

Was cooking. Yes. I've always really, really liked cooking. And I really also really like soup for a long time. I got really, really excited about soup for a while there when I was 15 and never really stopped. So, it's I got, a I received a cookbook about cooking soup for a crowd actually.

Although it was cooking soup to give to. Like distribute to like families you knew, or it was about setting up a soup club where you make sure you deliver soup to your friends so they have a dinner and you trade off who makes the soup. And so I've always wanted to do that, to have that kind of event. And I just think it's really important. I think cooking for other people is really important. Yeah, I really enjoy cooking for friends whenever possible, and it's always nice to have a big audience to cook. For.

Katrina:

Would you say that's. So the cooking is a very important part of this soup night past the soup part then?

Ezra:

Sorry, could you repeat?

Katrina:

The words aren't working, let me phrase that better. Would you say that it's not just getting people together, but also like the food itself? It's part of the community that you work with the Soup Night?

Ezra:

Definitely. It's just I want to. Care for the community whenever possible. I want to give people free food when possible. That's important. So it's important that the food be free. Also, we have considered switching it to like, sandwich night or something logically easier, but. It's just cooking the soup, that's a big part of the deal. Also it helps that I get free vegetables. That makes soup important, and soup is also more accessible it is. It's pretty easy to make it vegan, which is the lowest common denominator for like people who don't eat animal products, people who don't eat specific animal products, people who are lactose intolerant, it's easy to make in big batches. It would be difficult to make something in a home kitchen in big batches that was more individual, like, I don't know, pancakes or something that takes a lot longer, but soup you can make a large amount at once and for not too expensive.

Katrina:

Right. It sounds, it sounds like you picked a very good food product to make a night around then.

Ezra:

It's true. We put a lot of thought into it.

Katrina:

I guess, have there been, while you've been doing this event for about. Would it be about two years or so now then?

Ezra:

Yes.

Katrina:

Are there any notable events you can remember that happen while doing it? Things that you found impactful or interesting or importance or notable that you'd like to share?

Ezra:

Well, one thing to mention is that we have been on a break for the past for the past six months unfortunately just because of difficulties in locating a venue. But I would say the biggest, the biggest soup night event was the one in November at the Red Herring, when, because they had a social media reach that was very large and I'm not sure, just something about the timing just worked out and we got a ton of RSVP's, a really crowded room. It was just really nice. Yeah, it's just and then the soup night event that was. The worst, the harder part of the spectrum, was this past August when we decided to have an event on campus the weekend the students were coming back. That was not a good choice. Also, we had chili and it was ninety degrees. Also not a good choice. So we're looking to branch out into maybe a couple chilled soups this summer.

Katrina:

That sounds smart. If you could elaborate on why having the event that was just coming back ended up being not one of your best decisions.

Ezra:

Having the event when the students were back?

Katrina:

Yeah.

Ezra:

Well, we were at Illini Grove and there were a million, a million different events going on. There was actuarial science people. There was just a bunch of random groups also at the tables and it was hard to find a table. It was hard for people to find the group because there were so many other groups. So next, it's also just, yeah. It's a hectic weekend, the weekend the students come back and so I will in the future I think I will schedule it for a different weekend. And not the weekend right before the semester starts.

Katrina:

Fair enough. Out of curiosity, you mentioned earlier that you've worked with some organizations that are more connected to university and organizations that aren't, correct?

Ezra:

Mm-hmm.

Katrina:

Are there across the, are there differences between working with those like what your experiences with that have been?

Ezra:

Definitely because the university has a little bit stricter rules or there are people who I've worked with at the university care more about following those rules. The reason we cannot be from the Women's Resource Center currently is because they changed their policy so that the only, the only organizations that can use it outside of business hours, are official Registered Student Organizations and this is not a student based organization. I am not currently a student. My co-host as a student, they're graduating in May. And so it's. And they just care more about. Yeah, like I said, they didn't really want us to have a tip jar, and they weren't cool with 16 year olds coming unaccompanied, they were just very more careful and more. They had more defined restrictions I would say, and the Red Herring was not very much like that. However, the university based organizations have also been a little bit more organized in some ways and had better communication. They've had people there to like help set up, they've it's just been. So there's a trade off with the additional structure involved as well as, yeah. And as well as on campus. It's just really hard to find parking. And also, I don't want townies, I don't want non-students or people who aren't affiliated with the university to think it's just a student event because. So there aren't too many. There aren't too many queer events in this town to begin with, and the ones that there are, are largely based around this, the campus community, because you've got you've got Women of Pride, you've got oStem, you've got these organizations that are based around students and. And so it can be difficult for like, like just any other queer people to like feel welcome.

Katrina:

Have there been issues with that during your event?

Ezra:

There's been no conflicts or anything, but it's just a matter of a large percentage of our attendees, our students, and we like to encourage non-students to come whenever possible. Also, because it's cool for there to be people of different ages, that's important.

Katrina:

Yeah I get that. So I guess, what has your experience been like what are the? I'm figuring out how to phrase things. Are there any unexpected challenges you've come across with trying to diversify? Experience your events age wise or anything else with the event really that you've had to deal with?

Ezra:

It just makes it challenging to find a venue that's accessible from campus, so most students don't have cars, so that means it has to be either walking distance or like close bus distance. We also want to make sure it's accessible by bus for anyone who doesn't have a car. But I would say a higher percentage of townies or just, you know, people over 25, have cars and have driven cars and need parking. Also there was one event where there was someone who couldn't walk super far and had trouble. Yeah, like on campus would have to find parking blocks away and would struggle to get to the event from there. So it's important to find a venue that has, like, very good parking and very good bus access.

Katrina:

Fair enough. You've mentioned a lot, so I'm assuming that accessibility then, that's incredibly important to you and the event and in general then?

Ezra:

Yes. That's why we try to advertise as. As broadly as possible. Just try and put up the signs in as many venues as possible. Try and get as much social media exposure as we can. We just want word to reach everyone and maybe not just college students. Maybe not the people in my immediate network. Yeah.

Katrina:

You mentioned that when you're doing advertising that you put a lot of the like the advertising that shouldn't be. You hang those up and you go on to discord servers. Do you find that, I'm assuming, based on how you talk. Do you find it easier to get students to go than you do. Townies or people from other demographics like that?

Ezra:

Yeah. It's just also, I was a student, and so I was in more of the student groups for obvious reasons, and I know more students and it's just and there's maybe more centralized ways of reaching queer students because of these RSO's that we have and the discord servers around them. Uniting Pride also has a discord server, though, which has been helpful. It is obviously, it only reaches Discord users, which not everyone is, so that's why it's really helpful to have Uniting Pride. We might start an Instagram at some point. That's a complicated, that would just be another moving part. So we may not do that also just because it would be a little different. I don't have Instagram and I don't know if it would get buried for an account to have one, one post a month about the event. And so I really like our e-mail list for advertising. Because that's, if that gets very directly to people, people will know that they can find out about it whenever it's happening. I feel like people are more likely to see emails generally. I know they do get buried, but.

Katrina:

It sounds like that would probably be an issue no matter how you're advertising to people because... yeah. I'm trying to think of questions while you're talking to me and write them down.

Have you considered bringing more people on to help with being you and your co-host to help with stuff like that? Because it sounds like you already have a lot of moving parts.

Ezra:

Yeah, it would be really useful to find someone who would be able to coordinate with venues and then my co-host and I could focus more on the day of stuff. And not as much on being the advertising and the coordinating with venues, but it's just, it's hard to find people even when you ask people small things and they say they will bring napkins or they say they will bring drinks. A lot of the time that that falls through and they don't end up. They don't end up bringing those things. So it's just difficult to find, to find people, but I'm definitely interested in that. It's just always hard to like. I put out like, I've asked around online some "hey, is anyone interested in coming on to help with the soup night"? But yeah, definitely, my family has been very helpful. I was living at my parents' house until this past fall and so I was able to use their kitchen. Their car has been very helpful. They continue to let me use their kitchen and their car and just that's just very helpful. So there's a lot of people who help with soup night kind of behind the scenes. And yeah, my sister helped set. She's also another opinion. That's very helpful.

Katrina:

It sounds like you've got a good support group going then for getting this running at least. At least behind the scenes.

Ezra:

It's true, but I'm always looking for more as well.

Katrina:

Fair enough. So you mentioned, just curious about this. You mentioned that you were a student here before and I'm mainly curious about on the difference between anything you saw in queer communities as a student versus now that you're more in the community itself and not just on campus? What your experiences there have been at least.

Ezra:

Well, when I so I wasn't a student until August of '22 and then I was a student until around November of '23. And so it's definitely like the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center in the Union, like, that's a place there's a physical location there. Uniting Pride also has a physical location, but it's not a place to hang out as much. It's more of an office, and there are definitely. I've only learned as much about Uniting Pride meet up events and other events more recently, so those still exist. Also I noticed there haven't been as many queer events that I've seen at this school year. There were more last school year. I think because the LGBT Kiki did not continue. That was the queer RSO. Like general Queer RSO, a lot of the queer RSO's are more specific, like a Trans specific one or where, where, or. Yeah, Women of Pride. And so Kiki was a broader organization. They would have movie nights. They would have other events, and then they, they aren't existing this year. They do still have the discord server, which is. That's definitely, yeah I use it to get word out. It's pretty much otherwise dead, but yeah. It exists. So there are

definitely, there's more spaces on campus than off campus, but there just aren't that many spaces in general, especially since Queer Wet Dreamz was shut down. Yeah.

Katrina:

What were your, is there anything you've noticed with your experiences? Different like, differences in the atmosphere or community in on-campus organizations versus community organizations like not just like number stuff like just the, anything from like how the age differences, age ranges, changes, how it feels or anything like that? You can talk about?

Ezra:

Yeah, there's a. Yeah, there's definitely it's, there's a very, very clear age difference between on campus and off campus groups for obvious reasons. When I went to the Uniting Pride meet up group, yeah, there's definitely people who were maybe more in their 30s and 40s just. Yeah. Just maybe just not as much undergrad age. So yeah, that's to be expected with just general age range of people on campus and you know.

Katrina:

Have you noticed that like changing how the groups function at all or like what your experience within the groups is like?

Ezra:

I don't know. The events I've been to are just kind of different, in general. Yeah, just one was like a board game event at a cafe and one was like, I don't know, a movie night or something. So it's just it's just. Different. Different events. I don't know that there's a, like difference other than just to be expected with the events and the age differences.

Katrina:

Are there ones that you prefer?

Ezra:

Well, I think Soup Night is the best event. And yeah, I don't really like playing board games very much personally, so I think it's cool to have an event that's centered around an activity. It's like, you know, you're eating food. But it's also, there are like cards available at some of our venues. There are sometimes people will branch off into like playing games, but I, it's also nice that it's a little more social than a movie night where there's room for people to talk to each other and hang out. Like. To get to know each other, but it's good, it's centered around an activity.

Katrina:

Fair enough. Anyways, it does sound like a lot of fun. So, it's come up a few times that the general area that we are in right now really lacks, kind of lacks queer spaces or queer events on outside of really what you mentioned? Do you have any ideas on like what should be done to like, because of the experiences you've had, do you have like? A different perspective, you know like how you think people should go about trying to create more queer spaces or.

Ezra:

Well, it would be really nice if there was a building that queer events could happen and there will. There is a queer bar in town now. It's called Anthem. It's in downtown Champaign, I think and it's. I looked, it didn't, it didn't have very, it didn't have that much seating because it it's a bar, but it exists and that's really cool. I haven't been there. I haven't, I haven't really been there and there are other events, but it's just it's difficult to find a venue and it would be nice if there was a physical community center specifically for queer people, that would be very nice. And the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center probably comes the closest, but. That's just. That's only for students. And Uniting Pride, it's worth mentioning, they had their offices at the YMCA. They have a food pantry that's really cool. They have general resources there they have. You can get. You can get binders there, there's different exchanges, there's different, there's different resources there. You can ask them questions, that's cool, but it would be cool if there was a space that wasn't just for. That wasn't just for an office, but was a space where people could hang out. There are some notable queer owned businesses around town. The Art Coop is an art store that is extremely queer friendly. I believe it is owned by queer people, but it would be nice if there was a space that encouraged people to spend time in there. That wasn't about like, that wasn't exclusively a store.

Katrina:

Have you been to other towns or other places that you feel like have done it better?

Ezra:

I don't know it's. I just, I haven't been really in the like, queer community of other places very much. I am from here and don't really travel that much. So I don't. I haven't spent time in other, in other places.

Katrina:

Makes sense.

Ezra:

But it is nice in CU that we. I noticed this when I went to Bloomington, Indiana as well. There's just a lot of pride flags around businesses. And I would say that those aren't necessarily part of the queer community, but they're certainly welcoming to queer people. That's important.

Katrina:

Yeah, I can. I can agree there, it's. It can be very comforting to see it going into a place. Outside of your soup event, are there any just general experiences you've had in the queer community here in the Champaign area that you like to talk about?

Ezra:

Yes. So Pride Fest is Uniting Pride's big event for the year and it's, it's really cool. There's always a parade. I was unfortunately, I missed it this past year, but there's yeah, there's a parade, and they usually have offshoot events too. At one point, they had an event about like queer elders and like talking about queer history in this town, and they have other events. I

volunteered at Uniting Pride's youth and family event, so they have events, especially during. Yeah, that pride time. They have some kind of nature walk I think. So they do a lot of good stuff. I'm really happy they exist. That's definitely a major player in the queer community of this town.

Katrina:

How much of their stuff have you gotten to like, participate in at all?

Ezra:

I've been to a few different meetings of queer organizations, which were not for me. They're just. But I haven't been that active, unfortunately, in the queer community other than Pride Fest, other than having queer friends who were part of any organization. And I do know a lot of people as well as my workplace is very queer friendly and certainly a number of my current, of my coworkers have been queer.

Katrina:

So you've overall had fairly good experiences in the Champaign Urbana queer community then?

Ezra:

I would say so. The one thing that was challenging that happened was this past, this past fall, late summer, early fall when this other peer organization, Queer Wet Dreamz, was the target of a harassment campaign by mostly online group, gays against groomers, and they kind of. As far as we know, there were no people in this physical location who were with them but well. There were some people who wrote slurs on the porta potties before Pride Fest, so that's the thing, but. The gays against groomers, that was when people. Just. There was an event that was going to take place at Skateland and gays against groomers like called Skateland so many times, I believe maybe sent them threats, sent the organizers threats. That event got shut down and I don't think Queer Wet Dreamz exists anymore and. So that's, but we're, I'm part of the Peace Team, so we where we learn conflict deescalation strategies and just walk around at different events to help deescalate anything that would arise. The event that I was a peace team member for was extremely uneventful, which is good, and so I would say that that was certainly an outlier, and I would say that we are certainly prepared for any other, any other harassment like that, that should occur.

Katrina:

Just because I don't actually know, can you elaborate on what Peace Team is?

Ezra:

Yes. So there is an organization called Peace Team that trains people with like, conflict deescalation strategies. How to like someone is yelling at you. Here's how you like listen to them and like calm them down and here's how you read body language so that you can tell if someone is doing something and how you may. Yeah. And so. We it's just we wear yellow vests and walk around queer events and just in general we're also there to like answer questions and we're just trained in nonviolent deescalation conflict management strategies.

Katrina:

That sounds like an incredibly useful group to have around events like that.

Ezra:

Absolutely, and it's just useful in general. I found the training very useful. It was a series of Zoom workshops and yeah, with people who knew what they were talking about giving presentations. There was room for questions. Yeah, just preparing us for potential situations that might arise. Like I said, my experience was really, really uneventful. So there was no, there was no conflict involved at the youth and family event. It was just, it was just people walking around having a good time. But it was also just cool to be there and it's, yeah.

Katrina:

Are there any other organizations that you've been involved with on campus that you'd like to talk about at all? On campus or in the community, sorry, I'm so used to saying on campus.

Ezra:

Um, not that I can think of.

Katrina:

Fair enough.

Ezra:

I have a friend in the Co-op House system and so we're able to get word out that way. Through that network. So that's just one where I send my friend the poster to send out through, through those people that they know.

Katrina:

That's a nice contact to have. Throughout all these experiences that you've had with these through on campus with starting your own- through these groups in the community, with starting your own group in local community are there like lessons you've learned or taken away from it, or stuff to feel like you have gained from it?

Ezra:

I've learned so many skills in just event management, event coordination, logistics, Photoshop, cooking at a large scale because it's not, it's not a regular person scale. It's very large pots of soup, making sure I'm prepared and have all the extension cords and paper and whatever that we might need for the event. Advertising, a lot of advertising experience, a lot of just. Talking to people and taking on that more, maybe more of a public role experience, I've learned just so much. Also, just finding recipes that work with our, works at large scale, is vegan, and is low cost, so that's fun. I was just looking around and figuring out what that is and just doing soup math of like how many people are going to come, how many batches of soup does that make? Yeah.

Katrina:

It sounds like you have a lot of fun putting these events on.

Ezra:

Yeah.

Katrina:

I don't want to take more of your time than you have agreed to, so I guess I'll start wrapping things up. Is there anything else that you would like to add at all that you think would be important to add here or talk about or that you just simply want to talk about at all?

Ezra:

I'm going to think for a minute.

Katrina:

Go ahead.

Ezra:

Yeah, I've talked about there not being that many events on campus- now you've got me saying it-

Katrina:

Sorry.

Ezra:

-in CU, but there definitely are events, and there's definitely a lot of queer people in this town, there's definitely a community here. I'm just trying to bring people together. I'm trying to, because there's a lot of individual queer people, a lot of, like maybe queer friend groups, but I would like it if there was a more central place where people can meet each other and do cool things from there and feel. I just really want people to feel safe and supported. I want people to find community. I want people to yeah just have a place where they can go and have fun and feel safe for an evening. It's really important to me. And be fun.

Katrina:

Well it sounds like you have done a very good job at helping with that. Again I've been trying not to talk much throughout the interview, but I do want to emphasize I think that your soup nights sound absolutely fantastic and that you've been doing a lot of good.

Ezra:

You should check it out.

Katrina:

I'm kind of planning on it now.

Ezra:

Sick.

Katrina:

Thank you so much for doing this interview with me.

Ezra:

Yeah.

Katrina:

I'll go ahead and stop that, then.