

# Toward Holding the LGBT Coming of Age at Saitama – Coming of Age, Becoming true to oneself

Representative of ing!!  
Rina Matsugawa

*Notes for readers: Portions surrounded by boxes are commentary by COJ. The rest of the documentation is by Ms. Matsugawa, who received peer coaching after a Changemakers Academy workshop.*

This translation from Japanese is by Sophie Welsh and edited by Kanoko Kamata.

## 【Summary of project】

### 1. How would you describe the organizing project in one word? (Organizing sentence)

We want to create a society where individuals can affirm themselves, including people who feel isolated by their inability to express their sexual orientations and the sexual lifestyles they seek, by holding an LGBT<sup>1</sup> coming of age ceremony in Saitama for at least 100 participants, organizing 30 constituents and using their experiences, economic power, networks, various skills, and motivation for a comfortable society for LGBT people to approach the kind of society described above.



Organizers brainstorming about the event program at a meeting

The facility which became the venue for LGBT Coming of Age @ Saitama: barrier-free from the entrance to the hall.

### 2. What kinds of urgent topics are there for whom?

---

<sup>1</sup> LGBT is an acronym for “Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender” and denotes sexual minorities. However, it does not limit sexuality to those four categories.

Just a year ago, when I participated in an LGBT coming of age in Tokyo, one staff member said, “Until I met my current friends, I thought I was the only gay in the world.” I felt that I understood somewhat. This is because until a few years ago, I used to think, “I’m the only woman in the world who masturbates.” I had started masturbating in childhood, and around middle and high school, I wondered, “Am I the only one doing this?” and came to feel disgusted by myself. No matter where I looked, there was nothing written about female masturbation, so I thought it wasn’t possible except to myself. This action of mine became a top secret and was completely suppressed without even counting as a personal complex. When I saw myself naked, it felt as if I were confronting my masturbation, and I came to hate my body. But when I was 26 years old, I read Minori Kitahara’s book “Did you become beautiful through An-An-style sex?” which had happened to fall into my hands by chance, and for the first time in my life I came across the ideas that “women have sexual desire too” and “women can also be active about sex and eroticism”, and it changed my life. I was able to accept that I was fine the way I was, and I felt that I had become one with my body.

Around this time, I noticed that I had long held doubts regarding gender roles around “femininity” and “masculinity”. When I was a student, I’d had opportunities to go to seminars on gender studies, and I’d felt comfortable there for some reason, and I realized the reason for this: I’d felt relieved there because “femininity” was never forced upon me and I was accepted as I was. I think that spaces which do not impose gender roles are friendly toward everyone regardless of sexual minority or majority status.

As I started making realizations about my own consciousness of my own issues, I started thinking about whether I could do anything for others who suffer in similar ways. Concerns about sexuality are difficult to discuss, even with those close to us, and they can lead people to suicide. I have heard that the rate of failed suicide attempts among LGBT people is six times that of non-LGBT people.<sup>2</sup> I think it is an urgent topic to tell people with those kinds of concerns, “You are not alone”.

As I thought about what to do and where, a major starting point of this campaign was the wish of a member, a Saitama native and current resident who founded the team with me, to do something in Saitama. According to her, even if one comes out at an LGBT-related event in Tokyo, it is still common to return to the closet<sup>3</sup> after returning to Saitama. Coming out is not an obligation, but it could be beneficial to have a space in one’s own environment to affirm oneself as one is, and to celebrate each other. I believe I came to hold this position because I myself am from the countryside and because I was strongly committed to her. Because of these circumstances, it came to pass that we would hold LGBT Coming of Age @ Saitama.

---

<sup>2</sup> Produced by non-profit organization ReBit : “It’s not just male and female! Handbook for teachers to deal with LGBT children”.

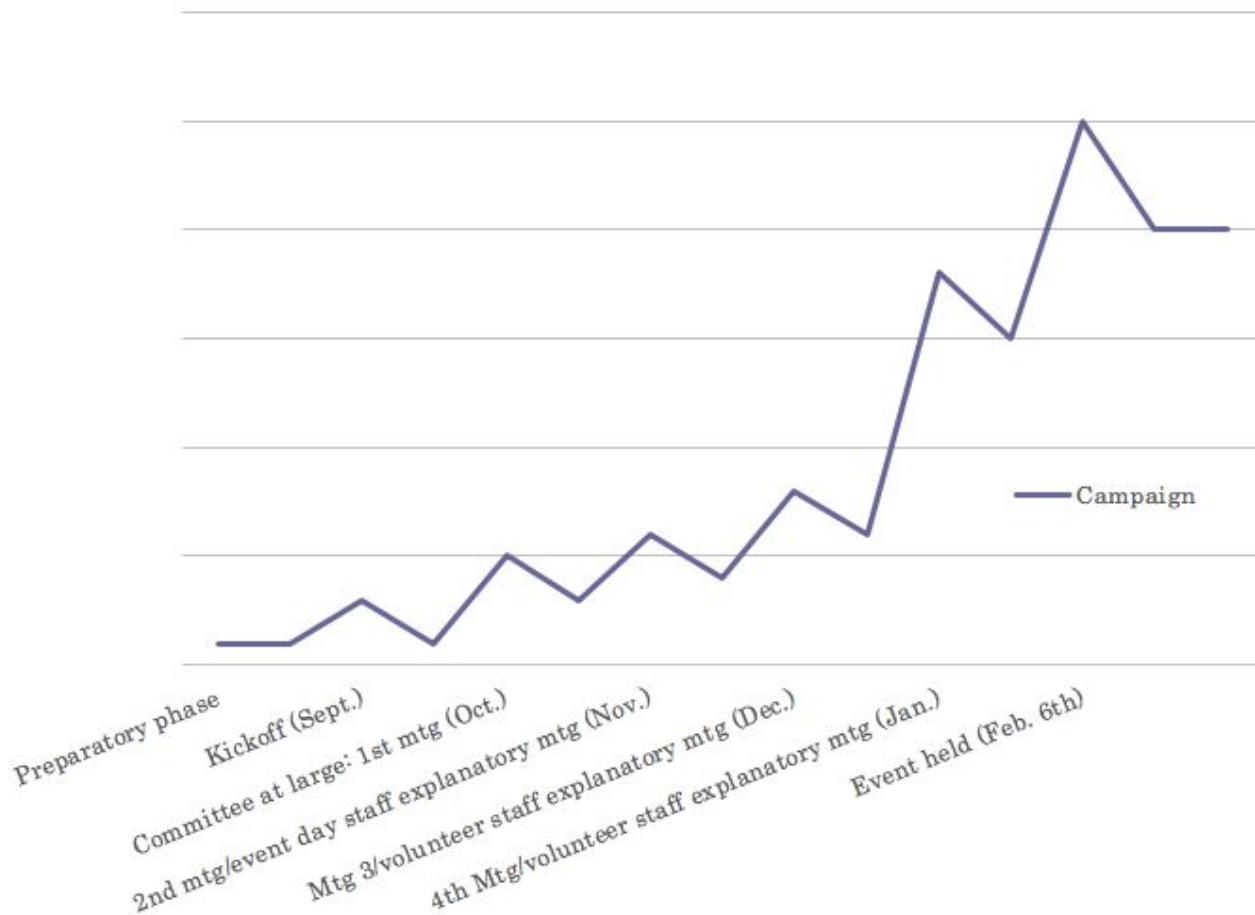
<sup>3</sup> A state of not having come out as LGBT

### 3. How can the issue be resolved? (Theory of change and strategic goal)

For LGBT people and allies<sup>4</sup> within Saitama Prefecture to create connections through this plan, and to enable people within Saitama to realize, “We have this many supporters”.

### 4. Campaign Timeline

ing!! Timeline (Lead-up to LGBT Coming of Age @ Saitama)



- During the preparatory phase, we assembled the committee at large (2nd tier), it became 5 people in September (7 people including the core).
- In October, there was an increase of 3 in the committee at large, 1 in November, 1 in December, totaling 12 including the core staff.

<sup>4</sup> Someone who is not LGBT themselves, but thinks about the rights of LGBT people

- The event day volunteer staff (3rd tier) increased by 6 in November, 8 in December, 5 in January, and 5 in February.
- From the latter half of January, the assisting staff for the event almost doubled.

## 5. Timeline

Year month	Activity · event
September 2015	Kickoff! LGBT Coming of Age @ Saitama Committee at Large assembled (Meeting 0)
October 2015	First Saitama Committee at Large meeting held. Members increased rapidly, and financing and other operations started. Core members increased from 2 to 3 people.
November 2015	First meeting for event day volunteers. Expansion to the 3rd tier.
December 2015	Increase in members due to scattering of organizing staff members. Increase in staff related to the organization of the ceremony.
January 2016	Committee at large meeting held in the first week. Unity among committee at large members intensified around this time.
February 6th, 2016	LGBT Coming of Age @ Saitama.

### 【Process】

Leading toward the final peak comprising the LGBT Coming of Age @ Saitama (held February 6th, 2016), we assembled the core team (1st tier), committee at large (2nd tier), other staff and event-day volunteer staff (3rd tier) starting in June 2015.

The core team held weekly online meetings and monthly online meetings, and held monthly offline meetings with the committee at large. The 3rd tier members held ad hoc offline conversations, but fundamentally held one explanatory meeting before the event, as well as final meetings on the day before and the day of the event.

#### 1) On the structure of the leadership team

The core team (leadership team) was first composed of Matsugawa, who first thought of the plan, and one other member. Each went to LGBT-related events and selected among those they met to hold one-on-one meetings in order to recruit others who would help with planning.

These new members formed the second tier (LGBT Coming of Age Ceremony @ Saitama committee at large). Some way through the process, one member of this second tier was highly motivated, and upon considering the core membership criteria (someone who can look over the planning as a whole and help think what is needed; someone who can participate in the weekly core meeting), this person was recruited to the core team.

The members of the second tier were at first organized on the criterion of having previously participated in monthly organizational meetings, but it became clear partway through that there were differences among the members' images of success. Upon convening, the core members conducted further one-on-ones and reset our course. After that, it became mandatory to conduct one-on-ones with those who would compose the committee at large.

## **2) Strategy**

Holding regular meetings for the committee at large and explanatory meetings for the event day volunteer staff (both at a frequency of once a month). Other activities were undermined by preparatory obligations for the success of the event, and team cohesion failed. The leaders also were not able to do their jobs well. As a result, a policy of "the person who notices does the job" arose, and much of the burden fell on particular members.

---

-

### **Commentary on skills used by COJ -**

#### **1. Skill of building relationships through shared values <Building relationships>**

LGBT Coming of Age @ Saitama at first was founded by Matsugawa and another workshop participant in June 2015. Since neither of them were connected to LGBT networks, they participated in various events by LGBT organizations, actively conducted one-on-one meetings, and recruited people with whom they shared values to the core and second tier committees. What was significant was that when Matsugawa communicated her values and foundational experience in her "story of self" and asked for her interlocutor's values and causal experience in "coaching", she said "Oh, I think I can take action alongside this person", and this is true in community organizing by connections through values. They conducted one-on-ones with 16 people over these eight months.

This is also in Matsugawa documentation, but they decided to always hold one-on-one meetings with people who would become members to share values. As a result, this sharing of values occurred thoroughly, enabling a fantastic ceremony with various people including LGBT people and allies cooperating with each other.

---

-

### **3) How to build an outwardly expanding organization**

There was a member in the second tier committee who sought actors voluntarily for the success of the event. They were able to receive cooperation in the forms of publicity, sponsorship, and donations from acquaintances. In addition, we gained more second-tier committee members and event day volunteer staff (venue preparation and introduction, makeup, hosting, and others who contributed to the event program).

At the same time, starting around October, we held a monthly “volunteer staff explanatory meeting” to recruit third-tier volunteers. We reached out through Facebook, Twitter, and network through committee members. At these explanatory meetings, we shared the ing!! Policy and purpose in holding LGBT Coming of Age @ Saitama, and had them talk about what had brought them, prioritizing the question of whether we could share values and the kind of society we aim for.

Partway through, in cases where members were going in a different direction to the event opening (“I want to leave the committee”, “we shouldn’t hold this event”), the leaders conducted one-on-ones and tried to solve the problem through coaching.

There were some within the committee who had been active in extracurricular activities and nonprofit organizations and had already been active in LGBT-related activities in the prefecture or the city, but half of them were first-time participants who had thought that they wanted to do something related to the LGBT cause. Thus, the LGBT Coming of Age @ Saitama committee was composed of experienced and inexperienced people of diverse ages and sexualities (pansexual<sup>5</sup>, genderless/nonbinary,<sup>6</sup> transgender, bisexual, homosexual, heterosexual, questioning<sup>7</sup>) as one of multiple LGBT-related organizations in the prefecture. Within those organizations, this was the first to hold a large event for over a hundred people at once. By the end of the ceremony, most of the members agreed to repeat it next year, and we had gained enough members to make a yearly continuations of the LGBT Coming of Age @ Saitama possible.

Below are the values that we indicated to at the committee meetings and to the event day volunteer staff.

(1) Policy of ing!! Activity

We seek to create a society where individuals can affirm themselves, including people who feel isolated by their inability to express their sexual orientations and the sexual lifestyles they seek.

(2) Purpose of LGBT Coming of Age @ Saitama

---

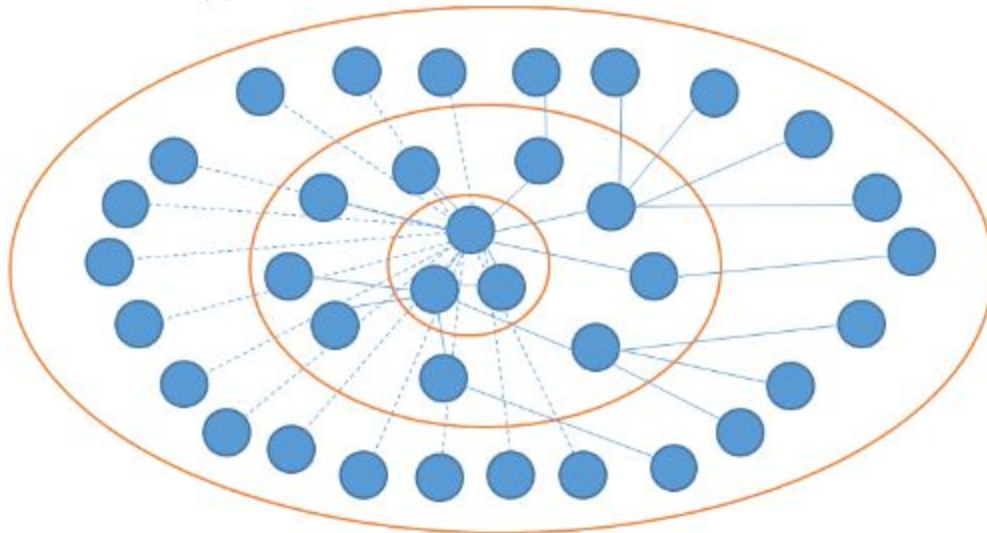
<sup>5</sup> Orientation which cannot be classified as homosexual or heterosexual. Not discriminate by gender. (Refer to the book "Yuri no Riaru" by Asako Makimura, Seikaisha, 2015)

<sup>6</sup> Those who choose to live neither as male nor female (same source).

<sup>7</sup> Those who have not yet chosen their sexual preference (same source).

- People who want to freely express themselves where they live, and their friends, family, and others who support them. To create a place where all can gather to celebrate their becoming who they want to be and feel the presence of people of all sexualities.
- To make it a space where people of diverse sexualities can share common thoughts and create connections.

Snowflake diagram



※The blue solid line denotes recruitments, the dotted line the explanatory meetings (gaining commitment collectively), and the red line the tiers.

---

Commentary on skills used by COJ -

## 2. Division of labor among teammates <Team structure>

They had a problem in raising motivation levels in the second-tier committee. Upon hearing out the problem in coaching, they found that the division of labor between the core team and second-tier committee team, and that there was a distance with the committee members. To clarify the division of labor that is crucial to the team structure, the core team discussed the allocation of roles and clarified the boundaries of responsibilities, and there was an increase in those who were active in the second-tier committee as well.

By preparing various member relationships with 1<sup>st</sup> tier being the core team, 2<sup>nd</sup> tier being the committee at large, and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier being the event day volunteers, we were able to snowflake.

---

4) Setting goals for the peak action, taking action, and reflecting on each peak action

Since the final peak campaign was quite a big project, it was difficult to create several peaks by then. Our alternative was the monthly committee meetings and the dinner party afterward. The core and committee members had done some one-on-ones, so the relations were built to some extent, but since there were few chances for the committee members to meet each other, and due to the large age gaps, their connections were thin.

## 5) The conditions of the project and goals going forward

On Saturday, February 6th, we held the final peak, LGBT Coming of Age Ceremony @ Saitama. The 3 first-tier core team members, 11 second-tier committee at large members, and 35 third-tier event-day volunteer staff gathered, and the participants numbered 139 (of which 99 participated in the mixer afterward).

We are currently doing post-event obligations (thanking the supporters, calculating payments). From March to April, we will hold committee meetings, reflect on recorded footage, reconvene committee members, and reorganize the team. The next campaigns we hope to conduct are a screening party of the film and the second LGBT Coming of Age Ceremony @ Saitama. The image below is a page taken from the pamphlet distributed on the day of the event.



**【After receiving coaching】**



By receiving coaching on topics concerning the team and ourselves, I was able to manage the issue and clarify what we would do toward the solution. I was able to reflect this in the team's operation, and it was extremely beneficial. A big source of learning was that through repeated coaching, I was able to watch Junko and Kanoko's coaching. Since we sometimes coached our team members, it was helpful. During our peer coaching, I was able to see other organizers, and sometimes they had the same issues I did. It was encouraging to see these shared issues. I was able to talk about things that were difficult to discuss in the team, so it was a good support.

### Reflection on the campaign

#### 1. Pluses (what we did well)

It was a big project and we had several moments of "falling off the bike", but on the day of the event, I truly felt glad to have undertaken it. I felt that we had fulfilled the goal of actualizing the presence the LGBT people of Saitama. I also felt we had expanded the campaign when several event participants said, "I would like to hold an LGBT coming of age in my area too."

#### 2. Deltas (points to improve)

There were only two others who knew the CO methods other than me, and I didn't know how to explain it to members who didn't know it. I felt in the phase directly before the campaign as if I was not putting them into practice.

#### 3. Lessons learned

I found that one-on-one meetings and coachings had a big impact on team building. At times when the team didn't seem to have a shared imagined goal, or when members were moving in opposite directions, we were able to manage the problem and right our path through one-on-ones. When asked, "I want to open an LGBT coming of age in my area as well, but how do I find people who have the skills? I don't know how to find teammates", I replied "I didn't look for skills, but look for the people who shared where society should go and the values."

Before participating in Changemakers Academy's workshop, I wavered, thinking "I want act in some way, but I don't know what to do", "I don't know if I have that kind of strength", but while reading the CO text before the workshop, I gained courage and came to think, "I too may be able to do something to change society." During the workshop, I was able to repeatedly reflect on my interests and make it crystalized, so that helped me to initiate this campaign.

### ~Writer's profile~ Rina Matsugawa

Born in Okinawa in 1986, raised in Ishigaki. Studied Okinawan history as a student. Developed a passion for the musical "Rent". A textbook problem arose during her graduate school days in Ishigaki, and she gathered volunteers for, planned, and



held a screening party of the film “Watashi wo ikiru” (*Living “Myself”*). Upon moving to Tokyo after graduation, gained experience in corporate work, part-time employment, and special education. During that time, she performed a self-written short one-person play, “Watashi to Watashi no karada tonno kyori” (“The distance between me and my body”) with her friend. She currently works as a temporary staff member at a children’s wellness center. She is recently struggling under the sabotage of her home refrigerator.