



DIRECT SUPPORT FOR DIVERSE SOGIESC

Beautiful Life Organisation (BLO) provides direct support to people with diverse SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sexual characteristics), through both mental health counselling and their drop-in centre, A Place to be Yourself (APTBY).

Lyhuor is a 29-year old transgender man who has reported experiencing a lack of warmth, love, comfort and encouragement from his own family; a lack of acceptance from society in general; has being looked down on; not valued; bullied and mocked; and experienced difficulty in finding employment. All because of his SOGIESC.

Lyhuor began working for BLO in January 2022 as one of APTBY's facilitators. He immediately started manning the drop-in space and providing peer support to visitors. Not only was he able to help visitors feel safe and comfortable, but his own confidence grew as he got to know different members of the community, learnt about diversity (and himself), was given value in being able to share his own stories and experiences, and also called on for his opinions and advice.

Lyhuor jumped at opportunities to learn more, joining various trainings that were available including topics such as Child Protection, Human Trafficking, Drugs and Crime, Working with Families and how to be Plastic Free. When other staff were not present or able to join, Lyhuor would relish being able to pass on his new knowledge during BLO's weekly staff meetings.

He also helped to organize, host and join BLO's various monthly community events, including youth discussion groups, boxing, bootcamp, yoga and Zumba sessions. Lyhuor says he learnt a lot through these events and that they also helped him feel comfortable and safe in different settings, like the gym, where he had previously wanted to go but did not dare.

“I'm an introverted person and I was so embarrassed and fearful of being judged by others about my identity. The Director has taken us all to the gym a few times, which encouraged me to go there alone.”



Lyhuor at one of BLO's community boxing sessions



"I never thought I would have the opportunity to continue my studies."

Lyhuor has also benefited from the information and resources that BLO create and share. He was particularly interested to learn about hormone therapy during one of APTBY's trainings, and was the first client at a local clinic that BLO helped set up as a hormone therapy provider in Siem Reap.

Looking back on the past 12 months, Lyhuor says he feels very different.

"I think I am now much more mentally strong, being comfortable with my own identity, learning that I am a valued person in the society and understanding about my rights. My final message is that I encourage everyone, those who identify as LGBTIQ+ and those that do not, to visit our space. Let's be confident and support and empower each other!"

Lyhuor was also awarded an educational scholarship through BLO to further his studies at university. Lyhuor describes this as "a dream come true." After just a couple of months studying, Lyhuor had already installed a modest whiteboard under the house in his village and begun sharing his knowledge with his nieces, nephews and neighbours. 8 children and youth joined his first session. Lyhuor also requested to bring a rainbow and transgender flag from APTBY to his university, so that he could explain to his class about people with diverse SOGIESC.

"I am so happy because there are two teachers in my class and they both accept me and show me respect."

A note from Lyhuor's teacher:

I just feel as normal. I have taught thousands of students including male, female, monk, gay, lesbian, young, old, and foreigner. I don't care where they come from, their background, or religion. I just love and treat them equally and help them if they have special needs... If I see discrimination happening in my class, I would explain privately to the person who is discriminating about the way we treat other people. I might say something like, "We should respect others like they do to us. Open your mind to be a kind and friendly person. You pay the same school fees, so you have the same rights as other classmates." My quotes are "Just be yourself" and "Be a positive thinker!"

