

If we want to serve rural populations, there is an effective way. Serve rural LGBTQ populations first because they are the most challenging. Then learn from the models and replicate them to serve others. Success would be that we see no more senseless death and suicides among the LGBTQ community.



Empowering human connection in one rural community at a time



"In ten years, nobody will remember the things you did, but they will ALWAYS remember the way you made them feel"  
- Chris "Link" Duarte; Founder & CEO

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Linking Dreams Consulting was founded in 2016 to help organizations be inclusive, expand their programs, and support rural communities with connection to resources and support. Being a pioneer in rural communities felt impossible. As one person, I could not do it all on my own. With more than 350 emails a day, it was impossible to respond to all the need.

## About Me: "The Outlier"



→ **Passion fueled my ambition**  
→ **Perseverance brought success**  
→ **Having a supportive community saved my life**

- I grew up 30 miles outside of Death Valley, CA. We were poor and life was grim- access to resources was not an option because there were none
- As a transgender person, I believed the "token" stereotypes that I was **crazy, sick, and disgusting**
- My daughter was taken from me because I was **gay/transgender**, but I fought back and



**won!**

Because I grew up in a rural community, my passion was to give back. My life has been difficult. I grew up poor and was the first ever to go to college in my family. My family was very traditional conservative and my father, who only had a 7th grade education, never learned to read or write. From as early as I can remember, I just wanted to be somebody.

I was born female and didn't transition until I was 26. It was not "acceptable to be transgender and there were very limited resources that were willing to support me. As a result, I have spent 8 years living in homelessness, have been fired from numerous jobs, and in rural communities, life was very dangerous for me. In 2004, my biological daughter was taken away from me. The judge told me, "no gay person has the right to raise a child." The loss of my child fueled my passion to create change.

## Rural LGBTQ Data is "Insignificant" and isn't seen as "valuable"



If we can connect rural LGBTQ people, when they suffer the greatest gaps and disparities, then we can serve anyone with those models

- More than **40% of the world is rural**; at least 1/5 of them are Gay or Transgender
- 67% of transgender people have attempted **suicide** and 1 in 2 will die within 10 years of "coming out"
- Only 13% of mental health organizations include LGBTQ+ in the United States
- **93% of LGBTQ people** who grow up in rural communities will experience **homelessness within their lifetime**

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Over the next 5 years, I put myself through school, graduating top of my class, as the President's Award Recipient; my university's highest honor. After attempting to find help to get my child back, and finding none, I ended up being the resource I had always searched for. I was the first to transition openly in Northern AZ and after 5 years, I returned to the same court, in front of the same judge, and won full custody of my daughter. Although I had won, I found that others around me needed help too. There were limited services, virtually no support, and the people that did want to help, had no idea how.

During and after college, I was asked if I could provide training to organizations in my community to help them understand how to support the LGBTQ community better. As I did more and more trainings, I was then asked to create programs that would serve LGBTQ people in need. I found this work very rewarding but exhausting. I had now become the face of the community with no support as a professional to turn to. I sought out funding to support the work to help others and found very limited funding. Most organizations in rural communities exist in silos; their data was not "significant" enough to draw in dollars. Everything came down to the ability to collect, track and interpret data. I began to

develop a special interest in how to make “data tell a story.”

## Fragmentation and Communication Silos worsened by Covid-19

- In the broader rural landscape, only **35% of Northern AZ has internet** and **100K kids cannot attend school online**
- Organizations **compete** for small grant \$ instead of working together in coalitions and partnerships
- Big organizations **steal data and exploit** rural communities instead of supporting them
- LGBTQ organizations have become **divisive** and push away potential support



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Over the next few years, I was able to draw in more than 5 million dollars to support the programs I led. This enabled me to partner with various organizations to share the work and support. Ultimately, I was leading data innovation before people around me could understand what this really meant. By 2012, I was asked to give interviews to the New York Times and USA Today and the University Program I created had ranked 14th out of 362 Universities across the United States. Everybody wanted to know: “How was I attracting so much support for rural LGBTQ communities.” My answer? “By created a critical mass of Allies who had loved ones that were LGBTQ and were empowered by my training and talks.”

## Solution: Build and Empower a CROWD of Allies



- **Empower** friends and family first!  
Create a **crowd of support**
- Then centralize support, resources and community into one online platform
- Create the **FIRST** rural support hub and make rural data **MATTER**
- Organizations can finally track their gaps, successes, obtain more funding

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I came to Harvard to make rural community data matter. It's not enough to just look at rural data. We have to attack the greatest problems first by engaging the most difficult to reach populations. LGBTQ people are afraid of having their data collected because they are afraid of how others might use that information. To reach this population, one has to understand how to build a crowd of support around them. I truly believe that if we can understand how to reduce gaps and disparities among rural LGBTQ populations, when they suffer the greatest gaps and disparities in existence, then its possible to serve anyone with these models.

## Market: Start in the Rural Southwest First



- 1.2 Million people in Northern Arizona and growing **QUICKLY!**
- Serve the LGBTQ population first by building allied support- the rest will follow
- Educate and inspire first, THEN LEAD
- Non-profit organizations, churches, professional services, and businesses NOW **HIRING ONLINE TRAINERS**



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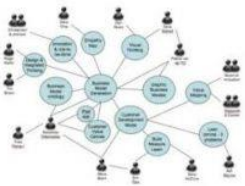
### Special speaker to present at GPUUC on Father's Day

Chris Duarte will tell the story of his heartfelt spiritual journey on Father's Day morning at the Granite Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation (GPUUC) at...

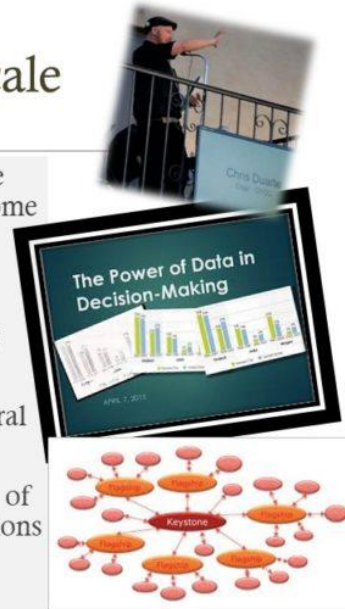
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Before starting the HBAP program, I was getting hundreds of requests to speak all over the country. I was even spotlighted in a documentary; however, I couldn't keep up with the demand. I decided that if I was ever going to be successful, I would need to focus on the program and learn how to lead this business effectively and sustainably.

## Business Plan; Start small and scale



1. **Scale and Monetize** 4 Exclusive Trainings to be available online- “point and click” residual income
2. **Post links** to inclusive resources on Linking Dreams Website
3. **Add to existing contacts list** to market product and build crowd through speaking and training
4. **Form Coalitions of Support** within broader rural LGBTQ communities
5. **Draw in funding** to create centralized platform of social support, resources, and business connections for rural communities



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It appears that there is so much work to do, but most of the work has been done already. All I have to do is press send on the marketing email. Once I do this though, I am going to need to have a solid operations structure and a plan. It will take funding to get my training accredited and it will take some help from some of my friends in the HBAP program to make the ultimate goal happen: A centralized platform that contains social connection, resources, and support. A data hub that collects and interprets data to be used for funding so that organizations that serve can help with support.

## Competitive Advantage; We have what it takes!

### Our Company

- ✓ **Niche** and a National Public Presence
- ✓ **Partnerships** with more than 350 Organizations
- ✓ **18 years experience** speaking and training more than 1,000 audiences
- ✓ **2 TB Cloud storage** containing rural data
- ✓ **Rural and LGBTQ Subject Matter Expert**
- ✓ **Advanced education** in Business Analytics and Leadership

### Their Company

- **Small and local presence**, many divisive in nature
- **Compete** for small grants and exploit funding
- **Lack leadership**
- **Lack insight and understanding** of existing rural data
- **No change agents** that have a passion for rural communities

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Our brand and our model stand out above the rest. Linking Dreams Consulting is not your average consulting firm. It has the opportunity to change the world by helping rural communities count and matter.

# Measurements of Success

- ✓ **Have demonstrated history of success** developing programs that serve people in healthcare, universities, community coalitions and much, much more
- ✓ **Have created more than 100 unique and exclusive trainings;** presented to crowds as big as 25,000 people
- ✓ The first transgender person to **win full custody** of my child in Arizona
- ✓ First transgender person to be **welcomed in church congregations** of all kinds to share my story
- ✓ **National reputation** for serving rural LGBTQ populations and transgender subject matter expert



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I don't wonder if this business will be successful, I know it will. I have seen how this topic and my training impacts people. Through tears, laughter, and learning understanding, it is possible to create personal connection for rural communities. It is my mission, however, to do it for LGBTQ communities first.

## Roadmap and Future Steps

### Phase I: The first 6 months

- Accredit 1 custom training and deliver to 2-3 audiences per week
- Go live with existing website
- Build on contacts list

### Phase II: 6 months to 1 year

- Strengthen relationships among stakeholders by engaging with coalitions
- Release resource tab on website
- Obtain assistance with analytics by engaging HBAP peers

### Phase III: Preparing a Platform

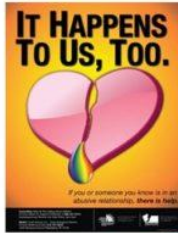
- Release custom training webinars and begin to draw residual income
- Establish collaborative entity that draws in funds to support LGBTQ resources and services (and LGBTQ inclusive organizations)
- R & D with existing data



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Investing in Linking Dreams means investing in lives. It means you have a desire to see rural lives count. It's not enough to help just one person at a time. By empowering audiences, the support grows exponentially.

# Invest in our Vision to make Rural Communities Count!



Many of my closest friends have committed suicide. With your help, people can finally get the support they need to lead fulfilled lives. **Please help me empower allies** to support LGBTQ communities far beyond my reach for long after I am dead.



**Our Customers**

- Educators
- Community Development
- LGBTQ Populations
- Transgender Individuals
- Counselors

**Our Advantages**

- More than 15 years in community and program development
- Proven experience in expanding identity and related related areas
- We make connections and general connections
- We recruit, recruit and train professionals
- We have a large network of organizations and professionals who support the work that we do
- We are evidence-based practice and are science-informed

**LINKING DREAMS CONSULTING LLC**

**Empowering People for Positive Change**

## An investment of 150K over 18 months

- 50K for E-Learning and Accreditation
- 35K for Administrative Assistant
- 35K for Software Capital
- 30K for Marketing and Optimization

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It's not possible for me to put in 12 slides, everything you need to know about why this matters. I can only share with you that I wouldn't be alive today if there weren't allies, who aren't LGBTQ, that loved and supported me along the way.

## Let's Connect!



**Are you interested in learning more?  
Would you like more information  
about our services and training  
solutions?**

**Chris Duarte**  
[c.duarte@linkingdreams.org](mailto:c.duarte@linkingdreams.org)  
(928)380-0108 (Texts Very Welcome)

**Mailing Address**  
P.O. Box 960  
Rimrock, AZ 86335



*"Helping people make the commitment to do no harm"*

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<https://digital.hbs.edu/platform-hbappitch/submission/empowering-human-connection-in-rural-communities/>