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Profile final

Brian Stanley wrinkled his nose as he breathed in the scent of last night's dinner. Tuna again.

He sighed and pulled up his sleeves. The clock said 7 a.m.

Ten hours later, the room was packed with homeless people, clamoring to get to the food -- to get to him. Stanley picked up the ladle and dropped a scoop of mushy casserole onto a man's tray. The man squinted underneath the poorly lit kitchen and murmured, "thank you."

Stanley spent his Saturday mornings pouring coffee to old ladies whose eyes wrinkled when they smiled and his Saturday nights reaching for dishes in the murky sink water.

To Stanley, the grueling work was worth it. As a 14-year-old boy growing up in Albany, he empathized with the needy and homeless. He could easily be in their situation, he mused, if his parents found out that he was gay.

"I could be a client at the soup kitchen, just as easily as anyone else," Stanley said, recalling his work in the soup kitchen eight years ago.

Stanley, now a senior at Boston University came out to his parents when he a sophomore in high school. They didn't take it well.

He grew up in a conservative, tight-knit family, Stanley knew his parents would have a hard time accepting his sexuality. He was the only queer person in his immediate

family. Like many others in this situation, he kept his identity a secret for two years.

LGBTQ individuals are three times more likely than others to experience mental illnesses, such as major depression or generalized anxiety disorder, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illnesses.

Stanley struggled. He stopped eating. He burned eight thousand calories a day by swimming and only consumed a hundred calories.

“I wanted to focus on being hungry and prioritize all that to all the feelings and needing to come out,” Stanley said.

When he came out to his family, his mother burst into tears and bolted up the stairs. His father chased after her.

Stanley sat quietly in the living room with his hands folded in front of him. His relationship with his parents would never be the same again.

“He suffered greatly from a lack of support,” said Kirstin O’Sullivan, Stanley’s best friend at the time.

His mother, who has guided him in a number of his values, rejected his identity. She did not speak to him for weeks.

And his father -- who has taught Stanley the importance of family through the family’s long tradition of hunting -- looked at him differently.

“My dad, my brother, my grandfather -- everyone hunts,” Stanley said. “After the day I came out, my dad never asked me to go hunting again.”

Stanley has remained detached from his parents since then. He has had two long-term relationships, neither of which his parents know about.

“I really had no one to talk to about if these things weren’t going well,” Stanley said.

Stanley, now 21, makes sure that everyone struggling at BU has someone to talk to.

He leads the Center of Gender, Sexuality, and Activism with 10 of his peers.

The student-run organization strives to give voice to institutionally marginalized groups, according to Boston University's official CGSA page.

As the internal manager, he helps provide resources, education, and a safer space for students at BU. He helps students connect with one another and makes sure that everyone feels included.

He promotes gender-neutral housing and gender-inclusive restrooms on behalf of everyone in the queer community.

He is committed to make sure that everyone receives the help they need.