

In one Oklahoma town, his secret changed everything.

# BROKEN HEART LAND

From the acclaimed new WORLD Channel  
series America Reframed, produced by  
PBS's American Documentary

## VIEWERSHIP AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

Written and Produced by Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation  
The Trevor Foundation, P-FLAG, and Still Point Pictures

## Introduction

This Community Discussion Guide is intended for screening organizers or facilitators that are seeking to use the film, Broken Heart Land, as a learning tool and resource to facilitate transformational dialogue. We encourage you to always use the film in tandem with open discussion and to have local resource recommendations available should anyone in the audience need them. This guide can be used for either public or private screenings, community or classroom settings, at conferences or trainings. Please feel free to only use those portions of the guide that fit your screening setting and audience. Best of luck!

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## A Letter from Nancy Harrington

Four years ago my oldest son Zack took his own life. He was 19 years old. When he told us he was gay at the age of 14, we were not surprised. We told him we loved him. Close friends and family immediately accepted and embraced Zack. So when he killed himself, we were stunned, mystified and devastated. We kept asking ourselves, “Why?!”



One week earlier the city council in our hometown of Norman, Oklahoma, had approved a proclamation recognizing LGBT History Month. But a bitter public debate ensued, and the comments from those opposing the proclamation were vitriolic and hateful. The meeting revealed a deeply divided community. Supporters of the proclamation

were shaken and in tears. Norman is a college town with a reputation for being progressive and inclusive, so the viciousness of the comments made during this meeting were shocking. Exactly one week later Zack committed suicide.

Could the comments made at the meeting have contributed to Zack’s decision to end his life? We still don’t know. As we sought answers to why he had taken his life, we discovered some revealing anthologies -- personal diaries he had written. We soon realized how much he had struggled. His views were much more complex than we knew. He clearly grappled with reconciling his own sexuality with opposing views in the community, particularly the anti-gay religious view.

Weeks after Zack’s suicide we learned that Zack had been HIV-positive for more than a year and had only very recently begun telling friends. Our hearts were broken again when we realized the pain he must have felt when he did not think he could share this information with us.

We realized that Zack had been HIV-positive when people spoke at the city council meeting quoting erroneous statistics about HIV/AIDS in the LGBT community, further stigmatizing and marginalizing our son.

As much as my family tried to vocalize our concerns about LGBT kids in our community, we were stymied at every turn. We attempted to speak out publicly at a League of Women Voters forum in the city council's chambers, but we were not permitted to express our opinions. I personally wrote a heartfelt letter to our local newspaper, the Norman Transcript, and the editor refused to publish it. I felt betrayed. I felt our community was being let down.

How could the community leaders sweep this dark period under the rug? I have begun to see the world through the lens of Zack's eyes, and I will continue to speak. My family and I will no longer remain silent.



There are so many areas that demand our attention as parents of LGBT youth. Sex education and HIV/AIDS prevention are critical issues. Eight states, including my home state of Oklahoma, have laws dubbed "don't say 'gay'" laws, which are outdated, incorrect, or judgmental in nature. They either don't allow any mention of homosexuality in public education or severely restrict discussion of

homosexuality. These states allow sex education that erroneously misleads our young people, suggesting that if they are gay, they will undoubtedly contract HIV and AIDS. Even when they allow mention of HIV/AIDS prevention, they maintain that abstinence until marriage is the only acceptable method of prevention. How can our LGBT youth be expected to remain abstinent until marriage when they don't even have the right to be married in these states? These laws are harming not only our young people who are gay but all young people. All young people need to know the actual routes of transmission and, most importantly, how to protect themselves! Our legislators need to stop making second-class citizens of our children who are LGBT. They can do this by taking the judgment out of sex education and HIV/AIDS prevention. The very young people who need the prevention information the most are the young people who are being alienated by the wording of the laws.

Our mission has become letting people know Zack's story and our journey. This is why **Broken Heart Land**, , which follows our story, is so critical.

The film's directors, siblings Jeremy and Randy Stulberg, became a huge part of our lives, following us for about three years and chronicling Zack's life and pain, the shocking city council meeting, the events that have happened since that meeting, and our journey through loss, pain, discovery, and awakening. Our intent is to help open lines of communication and convey that love is sometimes not enough. Our hope is that this film will save lives.

Zack was such a unique and inspiring spirit. We loved him beyond words. As a family, we want to honor his memory. We learned in the worst way possible how important it is for parents and families to bring up the tough topics, the potentially embarrassing topics, and the personal topics. Our children need to know we are willing to talk and listen. We need to be telling our young people who are HIV-positive or living with AIDS,



“You matter, we love you, and we want a cure for you, but until that happens, we are here to support you.” They need to know how important it is for them to protect themselves, and how important it is to us that they do so. They need to know that if they are sick, we will be there for them, and that if they have a problem, we will be a source of support. It hurts my heart beyond measure that my son, whom I loved so very much, didn't feel he could confide in me when he was most vulnerable. I want other parents to let their children know that regardless of their sexual orientation, their gender identity, and especially their HIV status, they are loved, supported, and valued. Now is the time. This is the moment.

## Film Info

Still Point Pictures newest documentary **“Broken Heart Land,”** directed by siblings, Jeremy Stulberg and Randy Stulberg, produced by Eric Juhola, and executive produced by Diana Holtzberg was shot over the course of three years starting after Zack Harrington’s death in 2010. The film is a feature-length documentary that directly addresses the critical issues of HIV/ AIDS awareness, lack of comprehensive sex education, and LGBT rights throughout the American heartland where these issues are still considered taboo.

## Synopsis

On an early autumn afternoon, in his parent’s ranch in Norman, Oklahoma, gay teen Zack Harrington killed himself with a gunshot to the head. One week earlier, Zack attended a local city council meeting in support of a proposal for LGBTQ History Month in his bible-belt town. When the floor was opened up for public comment, some community members made highly controversial statements equating being gay with the spread of diseases such as HIV and AIDS.

Against the backdrop of a town bitterly divided on the issue of homosexuality, Zack’s grief-stricken parents, both conservative Republicans and military veterans, are forced



to reconcile their own social and political beliefs with their son's death. Determined to understand Zack, they discover a private diary, which paints a gripping portrait of a boy in crisis. Ultimately, they discover a chilling secret that Zack kept hidden for almost two years, which leads them to some painful conclusions about their son's life and death.

When an outspoken conservative citizen runs for City Council, the Harringtons decide to join a politically active group called "MOMS: Mothers of Many" (mainly comprised of local mothers of LGBTQ youth). Over the course of the local election season, we witness Zack's family, once private and politically conservative, come out of their own closet, moving from private denial to a climactic and very public acceptance of their son's legacy.

## Release

Coinciding with LGBT Pride Month, the documentary aired nationwide for the first time on June 24, 2014 as the season finale broadcast for PBS WORLD Channel's America ReFramed, which showcases a series of independent films that take an unfiltered look at relevant domestic topics with personal storytelling tied to programming social themes. The film also had an exclusive world premiere at the Frameline Film Festival in San Francisco and has screened at the New Orleans Film Festival and the Daedalus Film Festival.

## About STILL POINT PICTURES

Still Point Pictures was founded by Eric Juhola and Jeremy Stulberg to develop and produce groundbreaking social-issue documentaries and fiction films. Their last feature documentary, *Off the Grid: Life on the Mesa*, premiered on The Sundance Channel after winning 8 best documentary prizes at festivals around the world, as well as being nominated for a Gotham Award. The film was also released theatrically, on DVD with Netflix, and online with iTunes. Previously, Still Point has produced and/or edited content for nationally airing social documentaries such as *The Education of Shelby Knox* (PBS, POV), *Tying the Knot* (Roadside Attractions), *My Mother's Garden* (MSNBC), and *Young Lakota*, which aired on PBS's Independent Lens in 2014.



## About the Directors/Producers

### Jeremy Stulberg (Producer, Director)



Editor and filmmaker Jeremy Stulberg's film *Off the Grid: Life on the Mesa*, co-directed with sister Randy, screened at over 40 film festivals worldwide, won eight best documentary prizes, was nominated for a Gotham Award, premiered on the Sundance Channel and was released on Netflix and iTunes. His work with Randy has been shown at the Museum of Modern Art and Lincoln Center, and they've received grants from ITVS, The Sundance Documentary Fund, Tribeca All Access, NYSCA, The Schwab Charitable Trust, and the Colin Higgins Foundation. Jeremy is a 2014 Sundance Documentary Producing Fellow. Editor credits include *The Education of Shelby Knox* (Sundance, PBS' POV), *White Horse* (Berlin Film Festival, HBO), several episodes of PBS' *NOVA*, and the *Independent Lens* film *Young Lakota*. He is a graduate of NYU.

### Randy Stulberg (Producer, Director)



Randy Stulberg is a filmmaker and writer whose film *Off the Grid: Life on the Mesa*, co-directed with brother Jeremy, screened at over 40 film festivals worldwide, won eight best documentary prizes, was nominated for a Gotham Award, premiered on the Sundance Channel and was released on Netflix and iTunes. Her work has been shown at the Museum of Modern Art and Lincoln Center and with Jeremy she's received grants from ITVS, The Sundance Documentary Fund, Tribeca All Access, NYSCA, The Schwab Charitable Trust, and the Colin Higgins Foundation. She has produced and shot for MTV, CNN.com, Discovery, Current TV, Vice, and the Posse Foundation. She is a graduate of NYU.



### Eric Juhola (Producer)



Eric Juhola produced the Sundance Channel documentary and Gotham Award nominee *Off the Grid: Life on the Mesa*. His “Untitled Transgender Youth Documentary”, currently in production, has received grants from the Sundance Documentary Fund and Tribeca Film Institute. Eric’s previous television directing & producing credits include *The Dr. Oz Show* for Oprah Winfrey’s Harpo Productions, *The Barbara Walters Specials*, and *The View* on ABC, as well as HGTV’s highest rated show *House Hunters International*. Eric wrote and directed the fiction short *Nowhere Kids*, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival. The short film is source material for a feature length fiction film Eric co-wrote and is slated to direct in 2015 called *Land of Enchantment*, with Patricia Arquette attached to star and Christine Walker attached to produce. Eric is also member of the Producer’s Guild of America and a graduate of NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts where he currently serves on the faculty teaching a visual storytelling production class.

### Note from the filmmakers:

“As a brother-sister team, we felt a deep connection to the Harrington’s story. Having lost an immediate family member ourselves when we were in our early 20’s, the roller coaster of emotions the family was going through is all too familiar. It has been harrowing for us to witness and document their pain as they try to reconcile their political beliefs with their son’s death, but it has also been cathartic to see them making peace with themselves by affecting positive change in their small community. Even though we live in a slightly more progressive world where gay rights issues and HIV/AIDS education have made notable strides in many large cities, Zack’s tragic story is representative of hundreds of young gay teens all over the Bible Belt, conservative small towns across America who are still wrestling with feelings of shame,” say directors Jeremy and Randy Stulberg. “We hope that through the film we will be able to start a dialogue across the country in the same way that the Harringtons have done in Norman, Oklahoma and hopefully prevent future suicides from teens in smaller towns who may feel hopeless.” - **Jeremy and Randy Stulberg**

## About the Issues Discussed in the Film; HIV/ AIDS awareness, Lack of comprehensive sex education

The Center for Disease Control has identified inadequate HIV prevention education and feelings of isolation as contributing challenging factors to prevention of HIV contraction among youth.<sup>i</sup> Perhaps it's a result of these and other contributing factors that have led youth (those aged 13- 24) to account for 26% of all new HIV infections. Gay and bisexual young men account for a disproportionate amount of these infections. When one considers that young boys are less likely to talk to their parents about sex (than girls) and that homosexuality is still largely stigmatized in certain communities, one can easily see the barriers that exist to creating healthy support networks for young people.<sup>ii</sup>

“Fear of contagion coupled with negative, value based assumptions about people who are infected leads to high levels of stigma surrounding HIV and AIDS.”

Factors that contribute to HIV/AIDS-related stigma include:

- HIV/AIDS is a life-threatening disease, and therefore people react to it in strong ways
- HIV infection is associated with behaviors (such as homosexuality, drug, addiction, prostitution or promiscuity) that are already stigmatized in many societies.
- Most people become infected with HIV through sex, which often carries moral baggage.
- There is a lot of inaccurate information about how HIV is transmitted, creating irrational behavior and misperceptions of personal risk<sup>iii</sup>.

## LGBTQ rights and mental health

Research suggests a correlation between ongoing discrimination (as that experienced by many LGBT individuals) and incidences of anxiety, depression and other stress-related mental health problems.<sup>iv</sup> Mental health is another heavily stigmatized subject in American culture, largely misunderstood and under supported in traditional healthcare. Breaking down the stigma around these important issues is necessary to helpful dialogue. The Harrington family's story provides a brave starting point to engage these eight different states in conversation that has traditionally been difficult, but could lead individuals to connect with life-saving resources.

- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among young people ages 10 to 24.
- LGB youth are 4 times more likely, and questioning youth are 3 times more likely, to attempt suicide as their straight peers.
- Suicide attempts by LGB youth and questioning youth are 4 to 6 times more likely to result in injury, poisoning, or overdose that requires treatment from a doctor or nurse, compared to their straight peers.<sup>v</sup>

## Quotes from Celebrities regarding the issues in the film:

“If your uncle don’t want to be your uncle no more, get another uncle.”

– **Magic Johnson regarding talking to family about one’s diagnosis**<sup>vi</sup>

“I have never been remotely ashamed of having been depressed. Never. What’s to be ashamed of? I went through a really tough time and I am quite proud that I got out of that,”

– **J.K. Rowling**<sup>vii</sup>

“[After therapy,] for the first time in my life I started to feel. It was such a humbling experience to not just push your feelings aside and ignore them. I’m thankful now that I’m feeling, you know?”

– **Demi Lovato**<sup>viii</sup>

“It’s bad enough that people are dying of AIDS, but no one should die of ignorance.”

– **Elizabeth Taylor**

“We live in a completely interdependent world, which simply means we cannot escape each other. How we respond to AIDS depends, in part, on whether we understand this interdependence. It is not someone else’s problem. This is everyone’s problem.”

– **Bill Clinton**<sup>ix</sup>



## Planning a great screening event

We understand there are many different settings in which people watch movies. In a classroom, at a conference or community event, or at home, with friends or family. This guide is meant to offer guidance for any of these settings. The goal of **Broken Heart Land**, its impact campaign, and, ultimately, this guide, is to encourage dialogue. The following is written with the intent to help you not just successfully host a screening but to also follow this viewing with open conversation.

## Timing

The film is 81 minutes long. In addition, we would recommend at least 30 minutes or more for a post-screening conversation, Q&A with special guests, and/or some time for sharing where those in the audience are invited to share their reactions, thoughts or personal experiences. You may also want to consider saving a bit of time for recommendations for actions following your conversation. It's always a good idea to have a response planned for if/when someone asks you, "What can I do about this now?"

## Find a Venue

Many places make for suitable screening venues: public libraries, local office conference rooms, community centers like the YM/WCA, local schools or universities or, of course, theaters. Here's a quick check list to run through when selecting a venue:

- Is it accessible for those with disabilities?
- Is it available on the day you want to screen? (Screenings during the week in the evening often work better than weekends) And for the amount of time you'll need the space? (at least 2 hours)
- Is it easy to get to via public transportation/biking/walking? And/or is there suitable parking?
- Does it have a DVD player, projection capability and/or a large screen TV?
- Can everyone you hope to have attend fit comfortably?
- Is it a neutral venue? (would all of your audience feel comfortable going there?)
- Other things you may want to consider: childcare for families with young children, are food and drinks allowed if you want to provide snacks, stage/high chairs/microphones if it's a larger venue and you'll need these for your speakers.

## Invite ‘Local Experts’

If you are hosting a public screening and inviting community members, it’s always nice to invite those in the community that are more intimately involved with the issue discussed in the film to speak or even co-host the event. This generally helps better rally the community to your event and will ensure that the conversation following is factually-based and thoughtful.

Post-screening discussion can be a panel of experts, it can be a public interview between two people, or even an educator moderating a Q&A with the audience. Due to the multiple issues the film touches, (HIV, LGBT, Sex education, Mental Health etc) the potential to include others is expansive. We provide question prompts below that may be helpful, but we also encourage you to take a close look at how these issues touch upon families and individuals in YOUR community. The more the conversation is customized to your audience, the more relevant and impactful the result.

## Gather Your Audience

Once the logistics of your event has been arranged, you will want to design an invite(s) and start to recruit your audience. We recommend creating an invitation with some sort of RSVP functionality so you can monitor who plans on attending your event and ensure the audience size is not too many for your venue or too little for robust conversation. Some examples of possible invitations are: e-vite, eventbrite, facebook events, meetup, or simply providing your email as an option to RSVP and you can monitor attendance that way.

Once created, circulate your invitation far and wide with a focus on those individuals, families and communities that will most benefit from the screening and subsequent conversation. Your ‘local experts’ or screening partners can be helpful with this.

## Promote Your Event + Keep the Conversation Going

Social Media is not only a great way to let people know about an event, it’s also an amazing way to start and/or continue conversation. We encourage you to highlight words of wisdom from your event on social media and use those platforms as a way to connect others to resources, talk about the film and how you plan on making your community stronger. (\*note: Please discourage audience members from sharing personal private stories that are not theirs on social media or using media to make disparaging remarks and comments. Social Media should be a means for promoting POSITIVE CONVERSATION not BULLYING.)

## Night of the Event

Welcome everyone and thank those individuals or organizations that helped you put the event together. Encourage people to stick around after the film is over to participate in conversation. In order to avoid losing most of your audience once the film is over, start your post-screening discussion quickly. The discussion doesn't have to move quickly, you can give people time to process after starting the discussion, but something should happen right after the film ends, otherwise audiences tend to leave before the lights come all the way up.

When in conversation, try to find a balance between encouraging people to share but not dominate conversation. You want everyone to feel as though they can speak, not have the dialogue be dominated by one or two voices. Therefore it's helpful to always have a moderator to help stick to constructive conversation.

## Sample Discussion Questions

- Did you learn anything about yourself watching this movie?
- Was there a part of the film that really affected you? Tell us about this moment in the film and why you thought it was so powerful for you.
- When do you think it's healthy and unhealthy to keep secrets?
- When Zack's friend Jordan learns Zach had AIDS she said, "It completely shattered my world because it changed everything." What do you think she meant by this?
- How do you think you would respond if a close friend told you that he/she was HIV Positive?
- What do you think you can do to encourage those people in your life to open up to you when they need someone to talk to?
- Do you discuss "tough" subjects at home with your family? If so, what does that look like and feel like for you?
- What do you think communities can do to prevent isolation in people going through difficult times?
- Despite the fact that many people understand how you can contract HIV, there is still significant stigma around the disease. Why do you think this is?



- Do you think homophobia exists in your town? How do you think you can appropriate address this fear in your neighborhood?
- Do you know what the requirements are for sex education in your city/state? Do you think people in your community are well educated about their own sexual health?
- How do you think families could better support quality sex education in your state?
- Do you know what the mental health benefits are for your current health care plan and how to take advantage of them?
- How do you think communities can best support the mental health of their residents?
- Do you know any families in your community that have lost a loved one? What would you recommend doing to support them during this tough time?
- If you could have leaders in your community watch, **Broken Heart Land**, what would you hope they'd take away from the film?

## Suggestions for Action

The culture of stigma reflected in this Oklahoma story, exists in many other parts of the country. If you'd like to do more to help in your area, here are some suggestions for action, as well as lists of local resources:

### 1. Get the facts!

If you are unsure of the details of transmission of HIV/AIDS and other STDs, please ask a trusted source. [Sex, Etc.](#) has a wide range of resources to help you get the facts and learn and it's organized state by state. Many of the organizations listed below also offer one-on-one counseling about what equals risky behavior and have many additional resources listed on their sites. tips on how

### 2. Get tested!

Whether you're a teenager or an adult, be responsible and get tested regularly for HIV and other STDs if you are sexually active. Set an example for your loved ones, and have conversations with your sexual partner(s) about whether or not they have been tested. You can find a clinic that provides testing in your area here: at [YTH.org](#) or [Sex, Etc.](#)

Some clinics have counselors on site. If your particular clinic does not offer counseling services but you would like to talk to someone in depth about your test results and what comes next, you can find local resources and someone to talk to at the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) or [MTV's It's Your Sex Life](#).

### 3. Fight Stigma

Don't remain silent! Challenge LGBT, HIV/AIDS and Mental Health stigmas by addressing incidences of stigma when it happens around you. Avoid language that promotes negative stereotypes of LGBT folks or people experiencing mental health issues, HIV or other illnesses. It's pretty simple: treating others with respect and dignity goes a long way.

### 4. Have the difficult conversations.

Talking to your parents, children, friends or other confidants about sex and relationships can be awkward. But connecting with others in empathetic dialogue can help prevent those closest to you from feeling isolated. Plus, sharing information and resources really can save lives.

Not sure how to start your particular conversation? Sex Etc. has a communication tool that offers prompts based on who you may be talking to and what you want to talk about. Find that [here](#).

### 5. Reach out to a friend.

If you know someone who may be suffering from depression or who's been stigmatized for their sexual orientation or HIV status let them know that you care by reaching out. You may also want to encourage them to connect with other individuals that can help. Visit [The Trevor Project](#) for other suggestions.

### 6. Support comprehensive, accurate sex education and healthcare.

Vote for candidates who support these things. If you don't know what sex education policy looks like in your state, you can find some great, user-friendly information at [Sex, Etc.](#)

### 7. Join a public conversation.

Fight stigma or promote accurate information and support services on your social media feeds. We're starting a national dialogue and want you to be part of it! Please tag your posts with #BHL.

## Resources --- NGOs listed

### Answer

[answer.rutgers.edu](http://answer.rutgers.edu)

### Greater than AIDS (a project of HRC):

[http://greaterthan.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/speakOut\\_HRC\\_guide\\_2014\\_download.pdf](http://greaterthan.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/speakOut_HRC_guide_2014_download.pdf)

<http://www.greaterthan.org/docs/Speak-Out-Guide-2013.pdf>

<http://greaterthan.org/campaign/speak-out/>

### Center for Disease Control

<http://www.cdc.gov/actagainstaids/campaigns/starttalking/convo.html#panel1>

### Sex, Etc. (a project of Answer's) is full of equivalent resources for youth:

<http://sexetc.org/>

### Gay Straight Alliance Network

<http://www.gsanetwork.org/>

### Human Rights Campaign

[www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)

### National Alliance on Mental Illness

<http://www.nami.org/>

### Planned Parenthood

[www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)

### Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States

<http://www.siecus.org/>

### YTH (Youth + Tech + Health)

<http://yth.org/resources/health-clinic-locator/>

### Resources for parents:

<http://answer.rutgers.edu/page/parentresources>

[http://answer.rutgers.edu/page/teen\\_resources/](http://answer.rutgers.edu/page/teen_resources/)

<http://answer.rutgers.edu/page/organizations/>

<http://answer.rutgers.edu/page/websites/>



## Citations

- i. [http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/age/youth/index.html?s\\_cid=tw\\_std0141316](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/age/youth/index.html?s_cid=tw_std0141316)
- ii. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db44.htm>
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- iv. <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/pages/facts-about-suicide>
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- vi. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/social-issues/endgame-aids-in-black-america/20-years-after-hiv-announcement-magic-johnson-emphasizes-i-am-not-cured/>
- vii. <http://www.youmatter.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/2012/08/01/six-celebs-speak-out-about-mental-health/#sthash.ic46gTEc.dpufe>
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