[*Gender Reveal* theme music starts]

**Molly:** Welcome to Gender Reveal, a podcast where we ask intrusive personal questions and hopefully get a little bit closer to understanding what the hell gender is. I'm your host and resident gender detective, Molly Woodstock.

[*Gender Reveal* theme music ends]

**Molly:** Hello, everyone. Welcome back to our series of mini episodes featuring the winners of the inaugural Gender Reveal grant. Before we get started, just a quick reminder that we have a Slack workspace specifically for Gender Reveal listeners and other trans folks to hang out and create community. It's like a Facebook group, except better, more organized, and you don't have to go on Facebook.com! We've got, like, 65 people in there right now, it's real cute—if you would like to join, there is a link in the show notes.

OK, as you already heard, our first grant winner was Rae White, the author of “Milk Teeth” and the creator of the *#EnbyLife* zine, who we spoke to all the way from Queensland, Australia. Today's guest is located more than 7000 miles away from Queensland, in Los Angeles, California.

[Background music starts]

**Diego:** Yeah, my name is Diego Girgado. I identify as nonbinary.

**Molly:** Diego, who uses they/them pronouns, is an advocacy specialist with Strength United Family Justice Center at California State University Northridge. Strength United is a community agency that specifically serves LGBTQ+ children and adults, among other marginalized populations.

**Diego:** We're located in Van Nuys, California, and we're a trauma center that sees survivors of sexual violence, physical violence, and child maltreatment. So we actually have a whole Pride United program here at Strength United, and all of us identify in the community. Me and a few other people identify as queer, nonbinary, femme, and we have others identify as lesbian. And this whole team comes together when we have survivors in our community, and we make sure that they are being heard. We have about 40 LGBT survivors in counseling.

**Molly:** In their efforts to make LGBTQ survivors feel affirmed and supported, Diego often finds themselves educating healthcare providers, social workers, cops, and other community members about how to show basic respect to trans and nonbinary folks.

**Diego:** It's really hard for individuals to understand a lot of people in our community. Take, for instance, our transgender, nonbinary and gender nonconforming survivors. Sometimes, law enforcement or nurses or DCFS workers will misgender them. They'll call them by their deadname and they’ll, you know, make them feel like they're not a survivor. And so that really surprised me. Working in this agency, I've been here for almost 2 years, and not a day goes by that I have to talk to someone and help them understand our community, and what our needs are.

[Background music ends]

**Molly:** Despite their best efforts to educate their community, Diego sometimes struggles to find safe and affirming shelter for LGBTQ folks in need. And that's where the grant money comes in.

**Diego:** So with the $250, we want to make hygiene kits for our transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming clients. Because a lot of times when we try to connect our clients into shelters, they're not affirming. And some of them say that they're affirming and when we call and say, "We have a client here, they identify as transgender, they do need a place to stay, they are in crisis. Do you have any availabilities?" They start asking questions like, "Oh, what are they wearing? Do they—are they wearing a dress? What's their gender, what's their sexuality?" It's like, ugh, like, no! This is a person that needs help.

So, what the $250 will do, it will give them access to toiletries like toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, baby wipes. And we can connect them with our case management services, but for right now, if we can't get them into a shelter right away, we can take them to a motel, they can stay there, they can use the hygiene kits. We'll also give them, um, grocery store gift cards. We want to make sure that these survivors get some sort of food and nutrition, and we're also going to provide, like, basic clothes, too. So that way they can change into them and they won't feel like they have the same clothes and it's dirty, or it's smelling, or it might have torn, or it might have other stuff on it.

We really want to make sure these clients are seen as humans. And when we put them up in a motel with these kits, we want to make sure that their humanity stays intact. Because I know how many times that I've called shelters, and they say, "No, no, no," and the survivor just feels worthless. And we really don't want that to be a barrier. We know how difficult it is for people in our community to access services, and we don't want them to be told no from us.

**Molly:** Despite struggling with outside agencies at times, Diego emphasizes that Pride United has largely been a positive space, not only for other LGBTQ folks in need, but for Diego's own gender journey.

**Diego:** I think it's really awesome that I have an organization that is trying to be LGBT affirming, and sometimes it's difficult working in this space, but it's really helped me as a queer person, as a nonbinary person, to allow myself to be seen. And when I'm seen, sometimes survivors will come up to me and talk to me about identity, talk to me about gender, even compliment me on my nails, and I'm like, "Oh, do you do nails, too?" Like, sometimes we have a conversation about it. And so, this organization and the work that I do, it's really amazing, because it helps me on my gender journey, but it also helps other people kind of explore what they're into.

**Molly:** Because Diego sometimes speaks Spanish with their clients, I asked how they approached talking about LGBTQ topics when speaking Spanish. Diego told me that while they try to use gender-inclusive language, they often have to meet folks where they're at.

**Diego:** With a lot of countries that speak Spanish as their primary language, they use transexual, or *transsexual*. That's the word that they use to talk about gender, or transgender. So we don't want to, like, come into this space and be like, "Oh, you shouldn't use that." It's like, if that's something that they're comfortable with, if that's something that they feel is something that's a good label for them, we have to respect that.

**Molly:** Because I can never resist the chance to ask intrusive personal gender questions, I asked Diego how growing up Cuban or Cubanx affected Diego's perspective on gender and sexual orientation.

**Diego:** I was, like, raised Catholic, so there's a lot of colonial, decolonial aspects to sexuality and gender. And so, I tried to reclaim a lot of my heritage and my upbringing, and I tried to take it apart and not have it so connected to a binary or deal with hypermasculinity. And so I try to queer it up as much as possible. So that's why I say, like, Cubanx, because I want to make sure that my community and people that identify as, you know, Cuban, Cubano, Cubana, can have a place for the LGBT community as well. There's that intersectionality approach to it.

[Background music starts]

**Molly:** If you would like to learn more about Diego's work, you can find Strength United on Instagram and Facebook. If you would like to donate to Pride United, which would be rad, Diego says that you should just reach out on social media, and whoever contacts you will arrange the donation. You can also find Diego's personal Instagram account at @lunxgirgado. Before we go, I of course had to ask Diego what their ideal future of gender would look like. Like Rae, I think they were hoping that I wouldn't ask this question, but guess what? It's Gender Reveal.

**Diego:** Ah, this question! My ideal world, my, oh my gosh. I really want to have the ability to live in a world where gender is seen and not seen at the same time. I want people to be themselves without being questioned 500 bajillion times. They know who they are and they don't have to tell them, or tell other people, who they are 500 million times. I just want people to be affirmed. And however that feels, however that looks, I want them to know that they have community all around.

[Background music ends, *Gender Reveal* theme music starts]

**Molly:** That's going to do it for this mini episode. You can find Diego and Strength United on social media. You can also find us on Twitter and Instagram at @gendereveal. We're also at [genderpodcast.com](http://www.genderpodcast.com), where you can also hire me for inclusivity trainings, talks, and private consulting—that'd be cool. And of course we're at [patreon.com/gender](http://patreon.com/gender), if you'd like to donate to our grant fund/show budget, which are the same thing. This tiny show was produced and edited by me, Molly Woodstock. Our logo is by Michelle Leigh. Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music by Blue Dot Sessions. And we'll be back so soon with more feelings about gender.

[*Gender Reveal* theme music ends]