

Director of Client and Program Services
TESTIMONY OF NATALIE ZANONI #171760

I will be reading this on behalf of Robbie Mair is

My name is Robbie Maris; I am 29 years old, gay, and a UWM graduate student living in the Milwaukee metro area. I came out when I was 16 to my parents. Having grown up in the LCMC Church, my parents turned to the Church. The youth pastor at the time recommended Exodus International, the organization that was the face of reparative therapy at the time. That is what started my unnecessary journey with conversation therapy and ex-gay ministries. When I went to my first Exodus International conference at 17, I came back and my friends said that I was brain-washed. I denied it, but in many ways that is exactly what I was, brain-washed. I bought into the many lies and false truths that the organization was preaching. It is because of Exodus that I quit drama in high school and took up track and cross country to make new friendships with men as opposed to women. Before exodus, I had two close relationships with two girls that I considered my best friends at the time as well as other close friends who were gay. Because of Exodus, I told these friends that I could not spend time with them anymore because that is what Exodus told me to do to help me to become straight. Doing this ^{irrevocably} damaged my relationships during such an important time of development in my young life. in high school throughout my senior year, I saw Eric Seybold a psychologist at Christian Life Counseling who was known as a reparative therapy psychologist. I would eventually attend two Exodus International Conferences, go to hours of reparative therapy counseling, travel to Memphis to Love In Action - a reparative therapy live-in ministry, and attend an Exodus International affiliated church with a reparative therapy program. This span of three years of my life wasted countless hours of valuable time, and it wasted hundreds of thousands of dollars investing in these ministries, their programs and resources. But what is worst of all is the emotional and spiritual damage it caused, the deep rooted shame that came along with attempting to change my orientation - which is in actuality physically impossible, the deep mistrust in the Church and Church leadership that ex-gay ministries caused me, and the severe depression I fell into during this time. Having lived through this

experience, I have since reconciled my faith and sexuality and identify as a gay Christian today. And as a survivor of the spiritual warfare that reparative therapy caused in my life, it is my deepest hope and prayer that reparative therapy and ex-gay ministries become illegal operations in this country, thus banning any religious or non-religious organization from ever damaging another human again. I am a living testimony that sexual orientation cannot be changed. Believe me, I've tried.