Employees discuss LGBTQ+A inclusion and workplace empowerment at the “Speak Out” event for Coming Out Day Oct. 10 in Patuxent River, Md. (U.S. Navy photo)

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. — The Patuxent River chapter of the LGBTQ+A Advisory Team commemorated the 30th anniversary of National Coming Out Day this year with a “Speak Out” event Oct. 10.

To kick off the event, the team showed the TED Talk video, "The Danger of Hiding Who You Are," featuring Morgana Bailey, a human resources professional who revealed herself as lesbian during the TED Talk. After the video, seven members of the team facilitated small table discussions on LGBTQ+A inclusion and workplace empowerment.

National Coming Out Day was founded in 1988 to acknowledge and celebrate the voluntary self-disclosure of living openly as an LGBTQ+ person.

“It’s about perspective,” explained Ed Hazelwood. “After coming out, it changes your perspective.”

Lizzie Orbaker reminded employees coming out can be a privilege.

“If you are hiding in that closet, and you don’t feel OK coming out, that’s totally OK,” she
said. “Do what makes you happy and makes you feel safe.”

Team members reiterated that allies and non-allies should ask questions to understand the LGBTQ+ community.

“Sometimes, when you are the empowered majority, it can be hard to see things from the perspective of the disempowered minority,” Hazelwood said. “If you want to get to know people and understand, you should ask questions.”

Asking questions was the purpose of the event, which gave the approximately 30 employees in attendance the chance to discuss issues ranging from LGBTQ+ pronouns and terminology to how to set a tone that is inclusive and respectful.

Inclusion is part of NAVAIR Commander Vice Adm. Dean Peters’ “Commander’s Intent,” issued in August 2018. In it, he wrote, “We live in an increasingly dynamic, connected and interdependent world. Our ability to meet the expectations of Navy and Marine Corps leaders and fulfill our commitments to the fleet is dependent on robust communication, deliberate inclusion and relationships built on transparency and trust.”

Hazelwood listed some ideas for allies to help empower LGBTQ+ employees within the workplace, such as speaking out if you hear tasteless LGBTQ+ jokes, communicating openly and confidently with your LGBTQ+ co-workers and helping non-allies understand the terminology.

“How do you approach someone who is different from you?” Steven Ramiro, the team’s co-administrator, asked the audience. He paused, then replied, “Ask questions, which we encourage you to do today.”

The LGBTQ+A Advisory Team was established in 2016 to support the recruitment and retention of LGBTQ+ employees, analyze barriers to full workplace participation and encourage visibility through awareness.