Wisconsin lawmakers’ anti-transgender bills and their broader implications.

The Center for Patient Partnership launches a dedicated LGBTQ+ health justice program.

As head of school at Madison Country Day School, he is committed to facilitating a safe and welcoming environment.

The Center for Patient Partnership launches a dedicated LGBTQ+ health justice program.

Breaking down Wisconsin lawmakers’ anti-transgender bills and their broader implications.
Our traditional and beloved Christmas concert returns in all of its aural and visual splendor, with our own Madison Symphony Chorus, The Madison Youth Choirs, and the Mt. Zion Gospel Choir. Joining us will be soprano Evelyn Saavedra, who recently starred in our Voices of Spring organ gala, bringing to us a voice of great beauty and a charming personality as well. Those of you who attended Madison Opera’s 2022 Opera in the Park will remember Limmie Pulliam’s show stopping performance of Puccini’s Nessun dorma. This remarkable tenor will join us as well, for a perfect way to start the holiday season.

– John DeMain, Music Director
“Gender-affirming care is medical care. Gender-affirming care is mental health care. Gender-affirming care is literally suicide prevention care.”

- Rachel Levine

Cover photo by Melanie Jones.

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228 Nov. / Dec. 2023, Volume 17, Issue 3

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The home buying and selling path should be safe for all. Join our LGBTQ+ and Allied Partner Panel for a FREE educational seminar starting January 2024.

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PUSHING BACK, MOVING FORWARD

GENERALLY I TRY to use this space to showcase what you’ll find throughout this issue of the magazine, but the past few weeks have been daunting. I’ve sat through numerous public hearings for proposed anti-transgender legislation by Republican lawmakers and have found myself both furious and disenchanted at the same time. The audacity of these exclusively white, conservative lawmakers to target and use some of the most vulnerable among us as political pawns—over and over—was hard to stomach. It has felt like every week, going on for weeks, we’ve had to scramble with our friends at Fair Wisconsin to get a new action alert out about a new bill slated for a hearing. There have been bills targeting trans student athletes at every level. There have been proposed medical bans on all gender-affirming care for minors. Another bill targets and misguides incarcerated trans people. Yet another exposes medical professionals who treat trans minors to legal liability. And the most recent is the equivalent of a “don’t say gay” bill that would not only require schools to out their LGBTQ students to their potentially hostile families, but also require schools to notify parents if a “controversial subject” will be taught or discussed in the child’s classroom. As Rep. Ryan Clancy (D-Milwaukee) said in his testimony against AB Senate Bill 480, “Trans kids are not considering suicide because of who they are, but who we are.”

While the reasons for my feelings of anger are potentially obvious, my disenchantment may not be. I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve sat through hearings like this not just in Wisconsin, but in many of the states I’ve lived in over decades of queer advocacy. While I’m grateful for the willingness of our vulnerable community members to testify, I have a hard time not seeing it as a kind of trauma porn for the lawmakers listening. I genuinely don’t believe that any of these GOP legislators care. I think their opinions on how they intend to vote are decided by coincidence that often these hearings are scheduled at simultaneous times to limit their attendance. Perhaps the only redeeming qualities by coincidence that often these hearings are scheduled at simultaneous times to limit their attendance. Perhaps the only redeeming qualities are testifying by their long-time love and business partner, Serge Pellicelli, who held a special place in his heart. Jerry was not only a beloved family member but also a respected figure in the LGBTQ Milwaukee community. He took on his caring and nurturing nature, always looking out for his people. His kindness and compassion left a lasting impact on the many lives he touched.

Jerry and Serge wished to extend their heartfelt gratitude to Nancy and Serge Pellicelli, who held a special place in Jerry’s heart.

Jerry was not only a beloved family member but also a respected figure in the LGBTQ Milwaukee community. He took on his caring and nurturing nature, always looking out for his people. His kindness and compassion left a lasting impact on the many lives he touched.

The staff at KRÜZ law, Jerry’s many friends, and KRÜZ’ customers all held cherished memories of him. He will be remembered for his warm and lovable presence and the love and care he bestowed upon those around him.

Jerry and Serge wish to acknowledge heartfelt gratitude to Nancy Breiling, the compassionate team at Aurora Hospital Home Care, the medical professionals at the Medical College of Froedtert Hospital, and the caring staff at Froedtert who supported him over the years.

In memory of Jerry, celebrate his life and continue his legacy of love.

We love water in all forms. We provide you with warm, cozy, natural fiber clothing.

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SINCE 2021, anti-trans legislation has spread across this country like a wildfire. While a few state legislatures passed, or tried to pass, bills limiting bathroom usage in the years prior to 2021, anti-trans legislation was very uncommon, and usually unpopular. Unfortunately, 2021, 2022, and now 2023 have all been record-breaking years for bills specifically targeting trans people. Trans youth, in particular, have been the main target of these hateful bills, but as these gain traction, some states, like Oklahoma, are starting to reveal legislation that would limit access to gender affirming health care for trans adults. The party waving the dual banners of personal freedom and parental choice above all else seeks to limit both the personal freedom of trans individuals of all ages, and the parents of kids who identify as trans or non-binary who want to give their children access to often lifesaving gender-affirming medical care.

According to the site translegislation.com (a site that tracks both trends and individual bills) 2021 saw the beginning of the disturbing trend of bills introduced, saying that “the U.S. appeared to be reaching an inflection point, as 144 bills were introduced in 37 states.”

Eighteen of those passed, including a law in Arkansas.

Wisconsin Lawmakers have recently passed several bills targeting transgender individuals. Governor Evers has exercised his veto power, but there are broader implications—and future concerns—as these scenes repeat throughout the country.
that passed despite a veto from their Republican Governor Tony Evers, who wrote in an opinion article addressing the veto, “The law permits the state to redefine who is and is not a parent, a profound and, I believe, dangerous overreach of authority.”

In a move that mirrors similarly unnecessary and discriminatory bills in many other states, this move appears to be entirely to rile up the conservative base, who have now identified trans and gender nonconforming people as their current boogeyman, as the 2024 election year draws near.

And 2022 saw the beginning of the hysteria around girls’ sports, as well as the “Don’t Say Gay or Trans” bills. We also saw states carving out “exemptions for discrimination on religious grounds and declared emergency changes to state law to deny non-binary birth certificates,” which, to a group of people already targeted and limited in their access to care, was terrifying. Transgender patients were counseled on the state’s “emergency powers to deny access to gender-affirming medical care for all minors—and would threaten the licensure of medical professionals who provide that care. Using tactics such as announcing public hearings on short notice (in what appeared to be an attempt to limit the ability of those who oppose the bills to attend) and scheduling those hearings to be at the same time as each other (diluting the effect of those who were able to attend), the conservative co-authors and their supporters hoped to get these bills passed as quickly as possible. All three bills easily passed in the disproportionately conservative Assembly, and Assembly Bill 465, known as the “health care bar” bill passed the also conservative Senate on October 17. Assembly Bill 377 stipulates that sports in K–12 schools, including public, private, and independent charter schools, should be designated for females. It specifically prohibits those who were assigned male at birth from “participating in an athletic team or in an athletic sport designated for females.” It also allows both individual students and educational institutions to “bring action against the school, government agency, athletic association, etc. if they feel that they have been deprived of the ability to participate in and win because of what they would consider to be a violation of this law.”

Unfortunately, Wisconsin gained national attention in the fall of 2023 as members of the state legislature, using the bills drafted in other states as templates, passed legislation that would limit trans students’ access to girls’ and women’s sports—as well as a bill to outlaw gender-affirming medical care for all minors—and would threaten the licensure of medical professionals who provide that care. Using tactics such as announcing public hearings on short notice (in what appeared to be an attempt to limit the ability of those who oppose the bills to attend) and scheduling those hearings to be at the same time as each other (diluting the effect of those who were able to attend), the conservative co-authors and their supporters hoped to get these bills passed as quickly as possible. All three bills easily passed in the disproportionately conservative Assembly, and Assembly Bill 465, known as the “health care bar” bill passed the also conservative Senate on October 17. Assembly Bill 377 stipulates that sports in K–12 schools, including public, private, and independent charter schools, should be designated for females. It specifically prohibits those who were assigned male at birth from “participating in an athletic team or in an athletic sport designated for females.” It also allows both individual students and educational institutions to “bring action against the school, government agency, athletic association, etc. if they feel that they have been deprived of the ability to participate in and win because of what they would consider to be a violation of this law.”


debates were set to continue until the end of the session as members of the state legislature voted to override the governor’s veto. The bill was signed into law on October 17, 2023.

In 2022, the conservative state legislature began to prioritize issues that have been abandoned as a rallying cry for the right—like marriage equality, which includes the right to marry for trans and non-binary people, and the right to health care for all people, regardless of their gender identity. The GOP has been trying to rally people around the prosecution of a small and often misunderstood group of people who are particularly vulnerable to discrimination in health care, sports, public spaces, and job placement. Sarah Kate Ellis, CEO and President of GLAAD, told The Guardian, “This makes drag an obvious target for those who inaccurately conflated being transgender to being a drag performer. These baseless drag bans attempt to erase, shame, or otherwise make it harder for LGBTQ+ people, and especially transgender people, to be themselves and to celebrate their communities and art forms.”

When the Dobbs decision came down from the Supreme Court in June of 2022, rolling back the constitutional right to abortion granted by both Roe v. Wade and Planned Parenthood v. Casey and returning the power to regulate abortions to the states, Wisconsin’s health care landscape relating to pregnancies and abortions was chaotic. A trigger law passed in 1849, before women could vote, went into effect, and Planned Parenthood, as an organization seeks to expand access to all healthcare, was forced to suspend all abortion services in September of 2023. The same teams were mostly

Wisconsin’s State of Abortion Access

We check in with Tanya Atkinson, Planned Parenthood’s Wisconsin’s President & CEO, about the path that restoring access to abortion is taking in a post-Dobbs Wisconsin.

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Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin announced that they would resume abortion services in Madison and Milwaukee following a ruling by Dane County Judge Diane Schippers, who allowed a lawsuit seeking to invalidate the 1949 law to proceed and ruled that “She did not believe the law in question bans consensual abortions by adults, and therefore the Wisconsin law should be allowed to stand.” The lawsuit, filed by Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul and Governor Tony Evers shortly after the Dobbs lawsuit, was put back into effect in Wisconsin that were dormant under the 50-year decision. “The lawsuit, filed by Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul and Governor Tony Evers shortly after the Dobbs decision came down from the US Supreme Court, would invalidate the 1949 law in favor of laws passed more recently that restricted, but did not outright ban, abortion in the state.

With 22 health centers around the state, only three provided abortions: Madison, Milwaukee, and Sheboygan, noted that abortion-related state laws make it in the center of the abortion through medication only “Even though abortion was legal, it wasn’t accessible,” Atkinson said. She continued that she and the organization are committed not only to protecting the right to abortion for everyone but also fighting the restrictions—both on the clinics and on those who are seeking abortions—to expand access to as many people in need as possible.

In a political climate where so many in the queer community are fighting for their right to body autonomy in a state where the legislature held hearings for three weeks in a row regarding access to gender-affirming care, the large majority of the coverage on the resumption of two of its clinics was to be inclusive as human beings, and to provide care across the spectrum with particular emphasis on pronouns and body parts, and the ways in which those who can differ from person to person.

The resumption of abortions and the lawsuit brought by Kaul and Evers makes it clear how competitive with unless restrictions are passed,” according to the Associated Press. They quoted Rep. Jared Bernadtsen as saying, “We want to make sure that women’s options have a chance in hell to be able to compete after all the training, after all the work that goes into getting this certificate.”

Republic Barbara Drabkin said that the short notice of the decision was to the community and that the new law will not affect patients who are currently seeing doctors. “This is a new decision that we need to navigate,” she continued. “We are working with our medical staff to make sure that patients are able to access care.”

In a packed public hearing on this bill, Allen convinced an audience of evidence to the contrary, that the science on allowing trans youth to access gender-affirming medical care, like puberty blockers, is not yet settled, and that those who give these treatments are “experimenting on children.” He continued by clarifying that this bill would not affect adults from accessing similar medical care, and would not stop minors from socially transitioning. Other supporters accused medical professionals of pressuring kids and parents into irreversible medical intervention, using the threat of suicide to get parents to acquiesce to procedures they would otherwise refuse. The opposition to Assembly Bill 465 refutes all of those claims, citing the Trevor Project’s statistics on mental health, suicide, and suicide prevention. Like Allen,, a Republican from the 49th Assembly district, the bill “prohibits health care providers from engaging in sex assigning and pressuring, or by using your gender in, or making referrals for, certain medical intervention practices upon children under 18 years of age who are transgender.” According to the bill, “In particular, to show that ‘transgender and nonbinary youth were 2 to 2.5 times as likely to experience depressive symptoms, seriously consider suicide, and attempt suicide compared to their cisgender LGBQ peers.’” On their website outlining the findings of various studies, the Trevor Project states, “Gender- affirming medical care, such as hormone therapy, is associated with positive mental health outcomes including showing promise for reducing suicide risk. A 2021 peer-reviewed study by the Trevor Project’s researchers, published in the Journal of Adolescent Health, found that gender-affirming hormone therapy is significantly related to lower rates of depression, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts among transgender people.”

PBS.org sites that in Wisconsin, only two groups have registered their support: A Catholic conference and the conservative Wisconsin Family Action. While the two groups have registered against the ban, “including Childern & Families, Wisconsin to the right, and to the left, the bill targets health care providers, the Medical College of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Council of Churches, and the Wisconsin School Social Workers Association,” Bishop Mark Oelrich, president of Catholic Health America of Wisconsin, stated during the well-attended public hearing that most trans people know that they are trans when they are a teenager, and that this bill and those that are similar would disrupt trans kids from coming out. “Trans kids are not considering suicide because of who they are, but who we are,” added Rep. Clancy, in his testimony that included personal experience of his son. In that same hearing, a 12-year-old trans boy, with the support of his parents, shared his experience of being shut down emotionally, and considering suicide, until he came out to his parents and accessed gender-affirming care.

In the packed public hearing on this bill, Allen claimed despite a mountain of evidence to the contrary, that the science on allowing trans youth to access gender-affirming medical care, like puberty blockers, is not yet settled, and that those who give these treatments are “experimenting on children.” He continued by clarifying that this bill would not affect adults from accessing similar medical care, and would not stop minors from socially transitioning. Other supporters accused medical professionals of pressuring kids and parents into irreversible medical intervention, using the threat of suicide to get parents to acquiesce to procedures they would otherwise refuse. The opposition to Assembly Bill 465 refutes all of those claims, citing the Trevor Project’s statistics on mental health, suicide, and suicide prevention. Like Allen, a Republican from the 49th Assembly district, the bill “prohibits health care providers from engaging in sex assigning and pressuring, or by using your gender in, or making referrals for, certain medical intervention practices upon children under 18 years of age who are transgender.” According to the bill, “In particular, to show that ‘transgender and nonbinary youth were 2 to 2.5 times as likely to experience depressive symptoms, seriously consider suicide, and attempt suicide compared to their cisgender LGBQ peers.’” On their website outlining the findings of various studies, the Trevor Project states, “Gender- affirming medical care, such as hormone therapy, is associated with positive mental health outcomes including showing promise for reducing suicide risk. A 2021 peer-reviewed study by the Trevor Project’s researchers, published in the Journal of Adolescent Health, found that gender-affirming hormone therapy is significantly related to lower rates of depression, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts among transgender people.”

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Kaleb Her of Freedom, Inc., a local advocacy group for people of color in Madison, spoke out against the bills in a comment to Our Lives, “Black and brown people are facing the highest health disparity rate. We struggle with heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, mental health disparity, and that is how the bills are being passed.”

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I’m now providing advocacy to Black and Southeast Asian LGBTQ+ folks in Dane County for years now, and when working with specifically trans folks, there were many barriers and hardships. Some of the biggest trends I saw were folks not being able to find stable housing, financial stability, and even getting their basic needs met. It is contradicto-
ry that our elected officials who are responsible for addressing health and education needs, are putting a ban on trans athletes and medical care when we have such high health disparity rates and are continuously heavily surveilled, po-
ciled, and pushed out not only in public spaces but even our own homes.

For his part, Governor Evers has come out publicly and strongly against these bills, saying that “not one of them will become law in this state.” Evers has been a staunch supporter of LGBT rights in Wisconsin since his election, and is the first Governor of the state to fly a pride flag over the state capitol during June, and in 2023 flew the progress pride flag. In a speech during the 2023 flag raising ceremony, he bemoaned lawmakers across the country to stop passing harmful bills, stating that their actions matter. “Evers has pledged to sign any bill that makes Wisconsin a less welcom-
ing, less inclusive, and less safe place” for LGBTQ+ people,” according to Advocate.com.

As noted earlier, these bills specifically target kids, youth, and young adults in college, but the GOP has no intention, despite their de-

ously, of stopping them. Leaked emails from other representatives in other states where similar, almost identical bills are being intro-
duced—and many are becoming law—and a roadmap to use these wins as stepping stones to discriminate against trans people as a whole. As of this writing, Republican lawmakers have introduced new anti-trans legislation for the third week in a row, this time targeting trans incarcerated individuals. Keep an eye on what is going through the legislature, and watch out for this gradual encroachment that they will certainly try over the coming years to silence and outlaw trans and non-binary people from existing. We can’t let that happen. ■

Stay up-to-date with area LGBTQ+ and allied organizations and non-profits, be informed, and get involved.

LGBTQ Organizations Update

General News | Awards | Staff & Board Changes | Events

LGBTQ+ organizations are announcing that medications used to prevent HIV infection, PrEP and PEP, are now available at health cen-
ters across the state. Patients can be seen in-per-
son or over telemedicine for PrEP and PEP ser-
VICES. Both medications will be stocked in all PPI and PPP clinics in southeast Wisconsin. Patients who wish to learn more about accessing care at Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin, or who would like to schedule an appointment, can do so at ppiw.org.

TRANS LAW HELP WISCONSIN is seeking vol-
unteers who want to support Trans* rights in Wisconsin. There are one-time and ongoing opportunities in operations, volunteer manage-
ment, administration, finance, and other areas for those who have time and skills to share.

WISCONSIN LEATHER PRIDE is proud to an-
nounce the winners of the Wisconsin Leather Pride 2024 contest, held October 21 at FIVE Nightclub. Four titles were run, with one con-
testant each. Two contestants made the mini-
finals. The event is a space to hear and be heard pro-
viding a shared pool of knowledge, identity, common interest, vision, and mission.

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Stay up-to-date with area LGBTQ+ and allied organizations and non-profits, be informed, and get involved.

LGBTQ Organizations Update

General News | Awards | Staff & Board Changes | Events

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VICES. Both medications will be stocked in all PPI and PPP clinics in southeast Wisconsin. Patients who wish to learn more about accessing care at Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin, or who would like to schedule an appointment, can do so at ppiw.org.

TRANS LAW HELP WISCONSIN is seeking vol-
unteers who want to support Trans* rights in Wisconsin. There are one-time and ongoing opportunities in operations, volunteer manage-
ment, administration, finance, and other areas for those who have time and skills to share.

WISCONSIN LEATHER PRIDE is proud to an-
nounce the winners of the Wisconsin Leather Pride 2024 contest, held October 21 at FIVE Nightclub. Four titles were run, with one con-
testant each. Two contestants made the mini-
finals. The event is a space to hear and be heard pro-
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school before attending Lawrence University to study music. His work as an actor/director asso-
ciate and direct support professional with the Encore Studio for the Performing Arts gave him
tremendous satisfaction, fulfillment, and joy.

GSafe has named Tyronne Crouch, Jr, as their new
Associate Director of Diversity Equity and In-
closure. Tyronne has worked with GSAFE as an
adult mentor for more than four years, being a
staple at the Leadership Training Institute camp
that is held every year.

EVENTS

has appointed Brandon Hill, PhD, who was featured on
our November 2022 cover, their new President and CEO. He previously served as the interim President and CEO while the board conducted a
comprehensive search.

WISCONSIN ABORTION FUND has expanded
operations and hired former co-director of
GSafe (and current Madison school board
member) Aly Maldow as their first executive director. In a statement to the Isthmus, WAF Board President Cy-
thia Lin described her as a
perfect choice for the posi-
tion. The organization is also
looking to hire an operations manager for book-
keeping and grant management.

WISCONSIN LEATHER PRIDE owner/producers
Sir Nate and pup Cyon announced that Produc-
ers Girl Becky and Daddy Sparkie will be taking
over full ownership of the Wisconsin Leather
Pride Weekend. Being members of the local
community, they provided extensive support to
make this weekend happen over the last two
years. Girl Becky and Daddy Sparkie affirmed
their commitment to ensuring the contest re-
mains a radically inclusive event.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Mindfulness- It will be shown at the Bartell Community
Theatre ($15–$45).

Soul 'n Unchained Theater Co. November 17
LNU will host the EP release of Basal Jones
titled “Quest” at Robinia Courtyard with guest
performances by Chakari Daeshare, GoddessN-
acole, and MC Sunshine Raynbow, and music by DJ Fenneke Noir ($10).

Madison Miniatures November 18 They will
hold their annual drag show, Jocks in Frocks, at
FIVE Nightclub to benefit GSAFE ($25).

Center for A Wisconsin November 20
The Center will host a hybrid event for Trans
Day of Remembrance to commemorate lives
lost due to violence, bigotry, and systemic op-
pression while also focusing on resilience and
empowerment within the trans community.

GSafe November 26-December 4 The 2023 Quilt
and Fiber Art Auction “In Rainbowland” will
be held online. As the days get shorter and tem-
peratures start to dip, GSAFE wants to help you
get cozy while supporting our LGBTQ+ youth.

Forge November 30 Trans Survivor Toolkit List-
ening Session Report Back Webinar. FORGE has been conducting Listening Sessions with
trans/nonbinary survivors, community mem-
bers, service providers, and allied profession-
als to inform a comprehensive, culturally re-
sponsive Toolkit. In this report, FORGE will
share the process of coordinating more than 25
Listening Sessions and some of the key find-
ings and emerging themes. Participants can ask
questions and respond to the information.

The House of Urban Arts Initiative December 2
20th Anniversary Showcase will be held at
MYArts Starlight Theater.

Perfect Harmony Chorus December 1 & 3
Perfect Harmony presents their winter season
concert, “Winter’s Harmony.” In these tumult-
uous times in the wider world and within the
LGBTQ+ community, Perfect Harmony hopes
this repertoire can be a salve amid the snow and
the cold ($30).

40 Flags Milwaukee December 9 & 10 Save
the date for this winter season concert.

GET INVOLVED

Our Lives reaches out to area LGBTQ+ organizations to seek information
for inclusion in this section. We also gather information from newsletters and social media
put out by the various organizations. If your LGBTQ+ organization would like to be included
in these updates, please reach out to us directly at contact@ourlivesmadison.com
And while we’ve made some strong first steps in the work, we need our community’s help to continue in our efforts. From direct show work to behind-the-scenes operations, the various roles involved in StageQ include:

- **Producers**: Work alongside the Board of Directors to bring a show from script to stage. Directors attend all rehearsals, and as such are one of the more involved roles in a show.

- **Directors (and Assistant Directors)**: Directors take their vision of a production and use it to guide the actors, designers, and technicians to bring a show to the stage. The stage managers sit backstage ensuring the rehearsal schedule is set. During the production, Stage Managers sit backstage with technicians to call the show (provide voice and direction in the various subcommittees StageQ offers. Meetings usually occur 1–2 times per month, depending on need. StageQ subcommittees are:
  - Fundraising: Find show/season sponsors, write grants, manage donor databases, and plan any fundraising-specific events.
  - Artistic: Read prospective plays, create season proposals, and help recruit for production positions.
  - Festival: In charge of aspects of CapitaleQ Theater Festival including play submissions, play reading, call for directors, event planning, etc.

- **House Managers, Box Office, Ushers, Bartenders**: These roles operate the front-of-house during shows. Whether it’s scanning tickets and selling tickets, serving drinks, or welcoming audience members into the theater, there are plenty of one-night opportunities to support StageQ shows.

- **Stage Managers**: Stage Managers act as the right hand to the Director and are the heart to keeping the show organized. They attend all rehearsals, taking blocking or using notes and ensuring the rehearsal schedule is set. During the production, Stage Managers sit backstage with technicians to call the show (provide cues and maintain the flow of the show).

- **Tech Crew (Lights, Sound, Set, Costumes)**: Tech Crew operate the light and sound equipment during the show. They join the production around tech week (the week leading up to opening night) and help the show come together.

- **Set Builders**: Builders come together to construct sturdy sets. Whether it’s coming in for a day of woodwork or painting, build days offer a creative outlet that is essential for a show with very little time commitment.

- **Actors**: Work with the Director, and occasionally Playwright, to take the character from the page to the stage. Actors attend rehearsals and are cast through auditions.

- **Board of Directors**: Board Members focus on the behind-the-scenes operations. This includes fundraising, budget maintenance, community outreach, program development, rehearsal/ storage space organization, and more. Board Members step in to fill in production team roles, as needed.

- **Committee Members**: Committee Members provide voice and direction in the various subcommittees StageQ offers. Meetings usually occur 1–2 times per month, depending on need. StageQ subcommittees are:
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**Torch Song**

A classic tale that has been exploring gender lines and bisexuality for centuries, StageQ brings a non-binary perspective to Shakespeare’s classic comedy of mistaken identity. After surviving a shipwreck and the loss of their brother, Viola must make a new life for themselves in Illyria, caught between a love-knot duke and love-kissed lady.

**CapitaleQ Theater Festival**, June 21–24, 2023

For one weekend in June, StageQ takes over both Bartlett Theatre stages to present brand new play readings, 10-minute shorts, and one-act plays by up-and-coming queeque playwrights from around the country. Complete with free workshops and masterclasses on various aspects of theater, we will celebrate Pride Month as the way we know: highlighting new, queer voices telling their stories.

**A NO SMALL ROLES**

In addition to joining the Artistic Committee, there are actually several ways in which community members can get involved with our theater, whether on stage or off. And we need people to be involved now more than ever! In addition to managing our current season, we are working hard behind the scenes to incorporate more accessibility efforts into our shows (a steady sliding scale ticket model, sensory-friendly shows, etc.). Our mission states that we aim to celebrate and advance queer representation. It is important to us that we are true to our mission and make actual efforts to truly be representative and accessible to all in our community.

**Theater Could Be For You**

We at StageQ very much believe that theater can be for everyone. Whether you’ve spent decades involved in productions or are just now considering for the first time a way to get involved, StageQ can be for you. If any of the above roles spoke to you, please reach out to either info@stageq.com or president@stageq.com. And, please come out see our amazing shows this season. For information go to stageq.org.

Because theater takes a lot of hard work and effort, we want to recognize and thank our current Board of Directors:

- **James Van Abel**, Board President
- **James Jones**, Board Treasurer
- **Shawn Padley (he/his)**, Board Secretary
- **Katie Blotto (she/her)**, Board Treasurer
- **Michael Palbar (he/him)**, Board Treasurer

While our Board has a focus of fundraising and public relations, we also want to recognize the current Board of Directors:

- **Caitlin Conley**, Board President
- **Peter Turino**, Member At Large

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The art form. That’s the drag we have always enjoyed the most. So, we there wasn’t a program that celebrated the campy and funny side of Dragula, which celebrated the darker side of drag.” Ashley said, “But and the Sugarbaker twins, in 2006. The following year they partnered with the owner of the West Hollywood location to purchase the HAMBURGER MARY'S CHICAGO was opened as a franchise by Ashley and Brandon Wright, twin brothers, in 2006. The following year they partnered with the owner of the West Hollywood location to purchase the franchise for standing up to the injustices in Florida. Our new location in Dallas has also been very active to prevent similar laws from being passed in Texas. And now there’s talk in Ohio about enacting similar laws. Our Mary’s in Toledo is ready to fight!” said Cherry.

But on a more serious note, Betty said, “Hopefully America will wake up from all this nonsense, but it is a stark reminder that elections have consequences. From reproductive rights being reversed to LGBTQ issues, we could have seen all this coming. But half the country isn’t paying attention. Now more than ever, it is so important to vote. From local elections on up to national ones.”

You can watch previous seasons of Camp Wannakiki on YouTube for free and purchase a subscription to seasons Four and Five on OUTTV.

following appearances at their Chicago-based location hosting “Gong Show Karaoke” the twins somewhat retired the characters of Cherry and Betty, as business pressures of running an international franchise took over. When things settled and they had time to think, the idea of a drag reality show came to the Sugarbaker twins. Brandon and Apple Brown Betty Sugarbaker (Ashley), along with co-conspirator, Milwaukee performer Dear Ruthie, who they knew would be the perfect foil to their Camp Director roles, as Camp Counselor Ruthie.

“I loved the concept that paid respect to America’s campy Kings and Queens. I eagerly accepted. There was a lot of brainstorming going on. It was the first season after all, and we had to plan out the concepts, activities, judging methodology, camp uniforms...everything. We all brought a lot of suggestions to the table,” said Ruthie.

Now in its fifth cycle, the show has grown a loyal fan base, first on YouTube, and now on OutTV by subscription. The competition is open to ALL performers who have a campy bend in their drag. Camp Wannakiki can be summarized with this quote from Camp Counselor Ruthie, “We take 10 of the country’s craziest, funniest, wackiest drag performers and dump them in a campground, where they must complete camp activities, judging methodology, camp uniforms…everything. We all try to rip the bandage off as painlessly as possible,” said Betty.

Even with the pain of leaving, the competitors are put through the rigors of “camp” assignments on every episode. “Season Four had the campers milking cows, boogie boarding on the lake, and performing stand-up comedy in front of a live audience. Season Five brought campers into a recording studio to record the song “Here for Camp,” and selling cookies on a busy downtown street. I also really loved the zip-line activity on Season Three and the intense ropes course from Season Two,” said Camp Counselor Ruthie.

With drag being in the news—day after day—as something less than wholesome, I must admit that this show is actually very wholesome! There are Hamburger Mary's franchises located in (Ron DeSantis’s) Florida which has put bans on drag performances in place. “We’re very proud of our Orlando Hamburger Mary’s franchise for standing up to the injustices in Florida. Our new location in Dallas has also been very active to prevent similar laws from being passed in Texas. And now there’s talk in Ohio about enacting similar laws. Our Mary’s in Toledo is ready to fight!” said Cherry.

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The Embraced Faith of Arielle Juliette

As the human behind Dance Life Studio, Arielle is an example of how faith isn’t exclusive to religion.

FAITH IS NOT A SYNONYM for religion. In speaking with Arielle Juliette (she/her), I learned that faith is too precious to be exclusive to religion. Arielle is a teacher and the person who developed Dance Life Studio. She expresses faith as a form of joyous, queer, celebratory ministry that is completely separate from religion or any particular need to express a belief in a divine creator. Instead for Arielle, her faith is in finding her way—and teaching others to find their way—to radical delight in our full physicality in this world.

In this column, you are invited to stretch both your understandings of what defines faith and your understandings of body and gender. Arielle is bigender and uses she and he pronouns. For this article, I will alternate pronouns when referring to Arielle. Arielle also goes by Julian, but in this space, I'll be using Julian also as a real part of her transgender identity.

When Arielle was young, she could see little of any future for herself. He names religion, even at a distance, as a core of the pain he felt, saying, “My parents were both raised very Catholic, and my dad was even in seminary. They both broke away from that religion in their 20s.” Though Arielle was raised in a post-Christian household that was, “very New Age,” she says that “Catholicism still heavily influenced the way I think.” Although Arielle acknowledges that “both my parents came from a culture of sexual shame, and that shame was passed down to me even without talking about it.”

Arielle did not find liberation in any organized religion. For Arielle, the path out came over time. “When I came to dance, I was a junior in high school, and that was kind of the peak of sexual violence in my childhood. Dance was what saved me.” Before he found his calling in dance, “I didn’t really want to live, because I didn’t feel like I had a community anywhere. I was feeling alone in my body. I was feeling alone in belly dance class I didn’t tuck my shirt up because I didn’t want anybody to see.”

Arielle describes himself as a young woman, “17 and so insecure.” But in dance, she was finding her people and her body. Arielle says, “I distinctly recall this moment of standing in class and feeling like, ‘I just want to be able to tuck up my shirt.’ That was the moment of me really coming out of the black hole of high school and adolescence.” In this desire, she “moved away from my body as a prison and a source of constant pain, a piece that I was told to keep inside, and I moved into, ‘OK! There’s some pretty cool things that my body can do and that I actually like.’”

Arielle found that she didn’t “care as much about how it looks. I was caring more about how it’s functioning, and how it’s working, and I have to take care of it.” Arielle’s belly healed. But all was not rosy. Even when he later started her own dance studio, Arielle says, “I was not at a peaceful place.”

Into the entering of the world, Arielle didn’t at first perceive any call to teaching or the creation of safe spaces for others to grow into themselves as he was beginning to grow. In fact, in those early days, Arielle thought he would rather be a nurse than a teacher. “When I started teaching dance, I didn’t really want to live, because I didn’t feel like my body was my own anymore.” She recounts an incident when she told a teacher “about this group of boys who were just putting their hands all over me in any way they felt at any time.” And asking the teacher for help, saying, “I need you to stop this. You’re the adult, and her just being like, ‘Oh that’s just what it is to be a girl.’”

This moment, far too common for so many girls, compounded by accident after accident in Arielle’s life, is not an only moment in which Arielle’s body was stolen from him, it is simply a crystallization of the truth that “there were lots of times where I was failed by individuals and just society.”

As Arielle did not find liberation in any organized religion. For Arielle, the path out came over time. “When I started dance, I was self mutilating, and I had a cut streak across my stomach. It was pretty deep.” For the first nine months of belly dance class I didn’t tuck my shirt up because I didn’t want anybody to see.”

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Arielle’s mom, “became the power of the group. That’s what sustains it now.”

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At Dance Life Studio, Arielle Juliette, in the company of women and non-binary people, has created a space of laughter and dance and something queerly holy, existing in its own space, separate from religion but wonderfully powerful. Arielle says that dance and teaching is “just one part of what, in my view, ‘Of God, has inspired in me to give.’ The studio is a sanctuary, a place where people who have been failed by the church can feel the spirituality of the place.”

How often do we think about how our bodies can find their way—to radical delight in our full physicality in this world. As Arielle has developed Dance Life Studio over the years, she feels that the creation of a healing space “is a big part of why people come in here. They can feel the spirituality of the place.” How often do we think about how it’s functioning, and how it’s working, and I have to take care of it.” Arielle’s belly healed. But all was not rosy. Even when he later started her own dance studio, Arielle says, “I was not at a peaceful place.”

Arielle tells of many who were transformed: “There’s one student in particular I remember. Her very first day, this would have been close to 10 years ago, I remember looking at her and saying, ‘Ah you’re one of us. You found your place.’ Because a lot of us who come in here and find a home here couldn’t really find a home elsewhere or struggle to fit in in other places. The people who really resonate with this as the church of Dance Life are the people who come in and are like ‘I’m home.’”

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In this space, the language on repeat is a language of uplift: “Every body is a dancer. Whether you are dancing and having fun, and you aren’t running into anyone, you’re doing it right.”
New Health Chiropractic’s New Chapter

Since purchasing New Health Chiropractic in 2017, Dr. Rich Merrion has grown the business by centering holistic, inclusive, and intentional care for our LGBTQ+ community.

GROWING UP IN INDIANA.

Dr. Merrion was a high school athlete, swimmer, and diver. He attended the University of Indianapolis for two years before transferring to Indiana University. Although he started college as a pre-med student, he decided after his first four years to go a different route. He spent 11 years in the environmental industry before returning to school. After exploring several options, he chose to pursue chiropractor school based on his positive firsthand experiences as a student athlete.

After graduating in 2007, Dr. Merrion ran a chiropractic practice in Naperville, IL, for over a decade. While his husband pursued a career in the same school. After exploring several options, he chose to pursue chiropractor school based on his positive firsthand experiences as a student athlete.

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WHAT IS GAY ART CLUB, AND WHO ARE THE ORGANIZERS?

Gay Art Club is a happening and a call to practice. We are a collective of local LGBTQ+ interdisciplinary artists who gather at locations across the Madison area to take up space and make all kinds of art. My name is Elizabeth David MacIntyre, and I organize club meetings and curate the Instagram page.

We meet at coffee shops and breweries around Madison twice weekly to practice our creativity and cultivate community among queer artists. This club has an expansive mindset about what a “club” is, what “art” can mean and what a “creative practice” looks like in real time.

Our Instagram account now connects more than 700 local artists in the Madison area and is still growing!

WHERE DID THE IDEA FOR GAY ART CLUB COME FROM?

The idea came from a few places. Our first club meeting happened during the summer of 2022 when we were all emerging from our pandemic sanctuaries. I think we were all missing our chosen families and chosen connections. I certainly was because I was new to Madison and missing the community I found living in Minneapolis.

I was eager to make more friends and collaborate with other queer artists. Body doubling is an essential part of my creative practice. I was also inspired by the folks who organize Femme and Queer Skate Night and the Sappho’s Secret dance parties. I borrowed some ideas about how to hold space from them, and I deeply admire the work they do.

It would be exciting to put together a Gay Art Club Gallery Night and Open Mic. I see an evening where Madison’s LGBTQ+ artists can celebrate their work with each other. There is art everywhere and a stage for our actors, writers, poets, performing artists, and musicians.

If anyone knows of a space that could hold that much queer joy, please let me know! 🌈
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A Lot to Learn

Mark Brooks, head of school at Madison Country Day School, says he felt unsafe at school. Now he is committed to facilitating a safe and welcoming environment for students and educators.

RECENTLY, MADISON COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL capped off homecoming week with a dance at the Overture Center. Students, whether straight, gay, transgender, cis, or nonbinary, all celebrated together to the beats of a popular local DJ. I’m so proud MCDS high schoolers accept each other as they are.

When I was a student, I felt unsafe in school. Always.

FACING DISCRIMINATION AND DISCOURAGEMENT

I never found school very engaging. In elementary school, I was an outsider. I knew I was different. As I got a bit older, I still had a hard time claiming my place in school. In high school, I was elected student body president. But the principal of my school said I could not take on the role: gay students were not allowed to hold the office. That harsh message could have left me defeated, but it ended up inspiring me instead. The experience motivated me to work harder and outperform those around me, making it more difficult for those in positions of power to discriminate against me because I was gay.

Many years later, when I finally got the chance to become a head of school, I made it one of my goals to make sure that every child feels included, feels known, and feels they belong at my school. I think about how much more I would have learned if I actually felt safe at school. I think of the ways I would have been involved as a student if I had felt I belonged. I want to work to make that change.

When I graduated from high school, the most popular college major in the United States was education. I wanted to be an education major, too. But my mother, the original tiger mom, said absolutely not. She told me that I’d never make any money in education, and somebody in our family had to make some money. It was straightforward. I could go to law school or medical school. Those were the two options.

As a head of school, I’ve prioritized increasing teacher pay. I don’t want others to be discouraged from a career in education because of money. Our son is a young teacher. I want him and everyone else who is called to the profession to be compensated for their talent, hard work,
might shut down if it didn’t have a leader. I said, “What do I know about running a school?” It turned out I knew quite a lot—and I had a lot to learn.

It was important to fail

That night, my partner and I talked and talked about whether I could help the school. This school was the most diverse independent school west of the Mississippi. He urged me that the school was too important an institution to allow it to fail. In the end, I agreed. I told the school, “You know what? I’ll do this for a year for you for a dollar.” Literally, that was the deal.

In due course, I took part in an educational leadership program for mid-career training at Teachers College at Columbia University, and off I went. I ended up working at the school for 11 years. The job was demanding, but I loved it.

I did face challenges along the way. Earlier, when my partner and I had enrolled our son at the school, we were the first gay couple ever admitted there. We did not receive the warmest reception. They had no history of gay parents at the school, and some faculty and parents were uncomfortable. Indeed, when I became the head of school, some families left.

But when I became a head of school, I decided I was not going to hide who I was. I realized that the kids—especially the ones who were gay or questioning their sexuality or gender identity—needed a role model. I wanted to show all the students that a gay person can be successful, can lead a school. At the same time, I wanted to show that being gay is just one component of who you are.

Later, I volunteered at another school in another city. I ran a $100,000,000 capital campaign there. We knocked down the school and rebuilt it in four years. In 2020, the new school was completed, and I felt my work there was done. I planned to take a sabbatical. Soon, though, I realized my sabbatical, like so many other things, would be canceled by COVID.

I left the school program and was working toward becoming a full continuum school. I was at a concert with the head of the school who had worked at the school for 10 years. We got permission from the company to equip a school with technology. We set up a full computer lab and every other imaginable tech device. But the faculty at the school weren’t prepared to teach computer skills and put the tools to use. By contrast, working in corporate America did not allow me to live fully. I spent so much of my life closeted. At the time, an openly gay person was not going to be promoted to the positions I held. It was exhausting to never talk about my life.

Eventually, I left the auto company and took a job as the general counsel for a dotcom startup. We were a software company, and, in those days, school technology was just taking off. I ran a $100,000,000 capital campaign there. We knocked down the school and rebuilt it in four years. In 2020, the new school was completed, and I felt my work there was done. I planned to take a sabbatical. Soon, though, I realized my sabbatical, like so many other things, would be canceled by COVID.

LEADING AN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

I got a call about a school that needed a new head of school in Madison, Wisconsin—Madison Country Day School. Years earlier, when I was a lawyer, I had tried a case in Beaver Dam. I spent my weekends in Wisconsin—Madison Country Day School. Years earlier, when I was a lawyer, I had tried a case in Beaver Dam. I spent my weekends in

But when I became a head of school, I decided I was not going to hide who I was. I realized that the kids—especially the ones who were gay or questioning their sexuality or gender identity—needed a role model.

I learned that MCDS had an International Baccalaureate (IB) high school program and was working toward becoming a full continuum IB school. The IB program is recognized around the world as the gold standard in education, one that develops caring, inquisitive, self-motivated learners. That piqued my interest. One of the schools where I had worked had a history of enrolling the children of families employed by different companies; many of those students came to our school from IB programs. These students would arrive ready to go—they were curious learners, and they were globally minded. I wanted to take on the challenge of getting MCDS authorized as an IB school for all grade levels. My immediate focus upon coming to MCDS was guiding the school through COVID. Since then, we’ve increased teacher salaries and benefits. I am grateful that the MCDS community has embraced increasing teacher pay, which has resulted in retaining and hiring the most talented educators. Thanks to those gifted educators, Madison Country Day School is now officially Wisconsin’s only independent pre-kindergarten through grade twelve IB World School.

I’ve also worked on inclusion and belonging initiatives at MCDS, incorporating faculty and staff training with Welcoming Schools. GSFAE. Welcoming Schools, run by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, helps educate school employees about how to create LGBTQ+ inclusive schools, how to support transgender and nonbinary students, and how to prevent bullying, and how to welcome all families. We also focused on how to make our workplace more inclusive and welcoming for LGBTQ+ colleagues. GSFAE, a local organization dedicated to creating just schools for LGBTQ+ youth, taught us about meeting the needs of LGBTQ+ students. I want to open our adults’ eyes to what it feels like to walk these halls as an LGBTQ+ student.

We’ve been able to implement trainings like these because MCDS is an independent school. I’m an advocate for independent schools. Independent schools, by their nature, are able to do anomalously what’s best for the students in their care. The leaders at independent schools are able to make decisions based on what’s happening right there, on the ground, every day.

A CHALLENGING PATH TO HAPPINESS

At school, I try to be authentically who I am. I want every member of the school community to be able to do the same. I’m mindful that there are people who may feel uneasy about me running their child’s school. That’s the cold, hard reality. At the same time, all students are safe here and able to be open with who they are. The students are supportive of their classmates and comfortable with this. For the straight students, I’m glad that they see me, a gay person, in a leadership role at school.

Madinson is a welcoming space for me, as was Los Angeles, where I worked previously. But not all educators in our country are as fortunate as I am to work in places where they are welcomed as they are. I’ve served on the boards of the California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) and the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). Both of these organizations wrestled with member schools discriminating against gay faculty, staff, and students.

Given the current political climate, it’s challenging for young LGBTQ+ people to consider a career in education. In the last year, more rights have been taken away from LGBTQ+ people than in a very long time. It feels like your rights are slowly being eroded around you. And it’s really scary—especially for students.

But I’m in education for the long game. Life changes, and I’m hopeful about the future. So, I would encourage young LGBTQ+ people to pursue work in teaching or school administration. We also need people who’ve already begun their careers, for example, people with business experience or social work experience. Being an educator has been the most fulfilling work of my life. I’m so lucky to be able to help the kids and help the faculty and staff, the people who are making the magic happen in the classroom.

Most importantly, I would encourage LGBTQ+ people to go into education because our kids need those role models desperately. When I was a student, I had no gay role models at school, and I felt like I had to fit in. I was an outcast. I was in a crowd morality. No young person should have to experience what I experienced.

I want all students to feel safe and welcomed at school. Students flourish when they feel they belong. That’s why I do the work I do. I want to wrestle with problems. I want to create solutions for students. Doing so gives me meaning and purpose. It’s exhausting, but it makes me happy.
Where Health & Justice Partner

The Center for Patient Partnership has launched a dedicated LGBTQ+ health justice program to support and advocate for LGBTQ+ patients navigating insurance challenges.

MORE THAN 20 YEARS AGO, Meg Gaines, a criminal justice attorney and lesbian, suffered from ovarian cancer. She found her skills as an attorney useful for navigating the insurance challenges of her diagnosis, and wanted to offer those skills to others with similar needs. The Center for Patient Partnership (CPP) was founded as a clinic within the UW-Madison Law School to educate graduate students through service learning. For example, they helped cancer patients with much-needed health advocacy. The group was rooted in the legal principle that everybody deserves due process and representation. Soon, the Center’s public interest soared. In 2005, Gaines was featured in the New York Times and other publications, focusing on her groundbreaking new project. The Center started to help break through the notoriously complex legal-health system in the United States.

In part, the Center’s activities revolved around insurance appeals, a process necessary for appropriate health care in a system that limits health services for millions of people. CPP connects the classroom to the community, and online, providing a unique opportunity for service learning in health advocacy at UW. They directly help people in need of advocacy within the notoriously complicated U.S. health care system, and then share those stories to advocate for change. Sarah says the program hopes to educate future leaders in insurance and the medical field to make better decisions regarding their health contracts.

With rainbows pinned to the gray cloth walls, a large table at the center of the room, the Center within the UW Extension building is a vibrant and welcoming space. Sarah Davis, the current director of CPP, and a member of the LGBTQ+ community herself, is hopeful for the future. She hopes to use the Center’s advocacy experience to advocate for systemic change. Like a good portion of the Center’s activities, a dedicated LGBTQ Health Justice Coordinator position will be funded by so-called “soft money,” or funding not obtained directly through the department nor the university. Toward this goal, Sarah says they had a future partnership. Those direct advocacy experiences are then put to work to help advocate for systemic solutions to health care problems. Like all service learning, there is a balance between the needs of participating graduate students to learn from their experience, as well as the needs of the patients from the community to benefit from CPP’s advocacy. The partnership between the university and the community forms the heart of CPP’s work.

The needs of patients have changed dramatically over the years. Patients come for help in difficult times of their lives, and the ability for the advocates to help them out and support them socially is invaluable for building trust when dealing with serious health difficulties.

The Center for Patient Partnerships has a standard process for building those partnerships. Once a person in need contacts CPP, somebody will reach out by phone within three days to learn about the patient’s needs and listen to their experiences and difficulties obtaining necessary health care. From there, the patients are informed about the program and its goals to educate the next generation of professionals through these freely available health advocacy options. Most of the patients appreciate having this resource available for free in their time of need.

The Center uses those experiences with patients to drive feedback and improve future advocacy partnerships. Those direct advocacy experiences are then put to work to help advocate for systemic solutions to health care problems. Like all service learning, there is a balance between the needs of participating graduate students to learn from their experience, as well as the needs of the patients from the community to benefit from CPP’s advocacy. The partnership between the university and the community forms the heart of CPP’s work.

The needs of patients have changed dramatically over the years. While some patients are provided additional support resources, others are left without those resources. Recent struggles include the Medicaid rollover this year that will cause countless people to lose health care in the aftermath of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Rural areas also face challenges since medical facilities tend to be located in cities or other heavily populated areas. This geographic disparity leaves much of rural areas without access to lifelong health options, and important advocacy help. The advocates and their supervisors can’t do it all, and they...
atmosphere, the intense backlash to queer and trans people and efforts to politicize an individual’s health decisions. He worries politicians are trying to make decisions that should be in the hands of a child, their parents, and their doctors. Some of this backlash, he reckons, is plain bigotry. This is about an individual’s health care and not politics.

guy john halcon participated in CPP the summer before and during his second year of law school. He recalls helping a client navigate their insurance denial for gender-affirming care. He describes the work as “hands-on” and “active.” guy came out as trans prior to attending law school, and needed to arrange his gender-affirming care around his classes and work schedule. As he sought out surgery, he notes that the Center was extremely accommodating and flexible. He had his own hardships navigating health care with an insurance denial later on, and worked with CPP with another law student to gain support in the process. guy was relieved to be able to vent and trust the folks involved with care, access, and legal issues. While system advocacy involves advocating for improvement for LGBTQ+ patients in general, processing relationships with patients in difficult situations, and building advocacy relationships with patients in difficult situations trying to get a fair shake from their insurance company and health provider. CPP hopes to develop new insight into the LGBTQ+ community in particular, as they tackle patients’ difficulties around gender-affirming care. They are building on a solid foundation of knowledge and community outreach to educate the next generation of legal, health, and social work professionals. Now, they hope to provide the LGBTQ+ community of Wisconsin the dedicated health justice coordination that we desperately need.

The new Dedicated LGBTQ+ Health Justice Program, seeks to be responsive to the community and engage in the sort of medical-legal coordination that the Center is known for. This program comes as a response to the demonstrated need in the LGBTQ+ community of Wisconsin. The Center is looking for a leader in this new program, known by the working title of LGBTQ+ Health Justice Coordinator, and the position was posted for applications in early October. This individual will be responsible for gathering community input and research-based evidence to drive the policies of the program. They will also recruit, train, and supervise students who act as advocates to partner with patients to improve their experience with health care within the LGBTQ+ community. Since this program will encompass social work, public health, gender studies, and legal and justice work, this sort of qualification and experience is required for the position. In response, CPP started a pilot program for advocacy with gender-expansive patients and insurance denials, such that about 40% of their caseload now consists of those cases. The need from our community for this sort of partnership is very clear.

Their advocacy work with LGBTQ+ patients includes both direct and systemic advocacy. Direct advocacy encompasses helping the patient with care, access, and legal issues. While system advocacy involves advocating for improvement for LGBTQ+ patients in general, gathering policy research, and communicating with state regulators. The Center for Patient Partnership has a history in building advocacy relationships with patients in difficult situations, and their new dedicated LGBTQ+ health justice program seeks to address a situation new in this uncertain sociopolitical climate. Having the support of an advocate can mean all the difference for folks in tough health situations trying to get a fair shake from their insurance company and health provider. CPP hopes to develop new insight into the LGBTQ+ community in particular, as they tackle patients’ difficulties around gender-affirming care. They are building on a solid foundation of knowledge and community outreach to educate the next generation of legal, health, and social work professionals. Now, they hope to provide the LGBTQ+ community of Wisconsin the dedicated health justice coordination that we desperately need.

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Tours the golden age of gay liberation with Michael Takach, revisiting a long-forgotten landmark on the release of this historic volume.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2017, was a night to remember.

After 44 years, Man’s Country (501 N. Clark St. in Chicago) hosted the first of two closing parties. And the old dame went out in style with Loose Ends, a 12-hour, all-inclusive “disco rave” featuring a three-story funhouse, rotating DJs, and drag performances from Divine (Lacey Stowes), Bettie White (Toyota Corona), and Grace Jones (Coco Iman).

That night was my first time inside Man’s Country. Although I’d been aware of its existence for decades, I had rarely had any reason to visit. And by 2017, it was nobody’s favorite. Truth be told, Generation X grew up not during the heights of gay liberation, but during the panic and paranoia of AIDS. But behind the masks, there was a result: we’ve been robbed of the social value, spiritual meaning, and cultural legacy of the bathhouse.

Bathhouses have been gay havens for over a century. Milwaukee’s Turkish Steam, located in a former Plankinton Mansion at 4th and Michigan, closed in 1902 due to “morals violations.” The city’s seven neighborhood natatoriums were also legendary cruising grounds on men-only days. Throughout the 1970s, Milwaukee had four fully functional gay bathhouses. They were, unfortunately, targeted by the Milwaukee Vice Squad with brutal and oppressive raids. The Bistro Too was reinvented as the Chicago Eagle in 1993.

The AIDS crisis deeply wounded Man’s Country, and business never truly recovered to earlier levels. Renfrow decided to reinvest his business. He partnered with club king Eddie Dugan to resurrect the Bistro, once known as the “Studio 54 of the Midwest.” Bistro Too opened in October, 1987 as a gay bar packed with glitterati. The high-energy dance club, decorated in a combination of Art Deco and high-tech, was the kind of place where anything could happen. Many remember hearing house music for the first time at Bistro Too. John Brown, the DJ who had pioneered shows showed surreal video clips, robotic lighting pulsated in time with the music, cash cannons and glitter explosions were constantly firing off, and host Memory Lane (dressed as a nurse) sold shots on the dancefloor.

The Freedom. The unity. The brotherhood. THIS moment is what it was.

THE AIDS CRISIS AND BISTRO TOO

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The Bistro Too was reinvented as the Chicago Eagle in 1993. Customers now entered through the cab of a semi-truck parked in the alleyway. The leather bar featured relics from the Gold Coast, including Jeff Stryker, and a “porn star suite” was built upstairs while a discotheque was added. Performances included Divine, Boy George, the Village People, Thelma Houston, and Hazell Dean. Porn stars visited on a regular basis, and the legendary “Orgy Room” (which was, oddly enough, carpeted). On weekend mornings, the spa offered continental breakfast on an rooftop sundance, accessible by spiral staircase. The lower level offered a 24-hour souvenir shop and snack bar (later, a juice bar) for visitors. In 1996, an adult film was shot within those walls, and later, the first two Grabby Awards ceremonies were hosted there.

“Man’s Country is like a mythical fantasy land somewhere around the corner from Nirvana,” wrote Drummer magazine.

Prescriptive, sex-positive advertising did the trick. Members came from all over the midwest. Some stayed for hours—others checked in for days on end. At the height of its popularity, there were lines down Clark Street for the first time waiting to get in.

But why? Former members explain in their own words:

“It was a political statement to celebrate your sexuality in the 1970s. At Man’s Country, I felt so much positive sexual energy. I felt connected to one another.”

“I had to be straight all day, but at Man’s Country I could be myself. There was such powerful being around people and not having to hide who I was.”

“Man’s Country was a self-contained place, where we were sequestered from the rest of the world that didn’t get us. It was not just hot and sexy — there was a sense of camaraderie and safety to just hang out in this all-male, gay-world.”

“Man’s Country was wrong in all the right ways. There was something primal there. It was like a thrilling throwback to a more exciting time. This is what being a sexual outlaw felt like. I liked feeling that I was doing something subversive.”

“It was down and dirty, raunchy, a little terrifying, but always very sexy.”

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“IT felt like we were losing a part of our world and it was not coming back,” said an Eagle fan. “It was saying goodbye to the place where we could explore and be free. The Eagle was a place to be uninhibited and explore a lesbian leather code of ethics. To see it close was heartbreaking.”

Over the next 10 years, Man’s Country became increasingly run down to the point where some areas were actually falling apart. Maintenance was not as good as it had been in its eighties, couldn’t keep fighting. In October 2016, he finally surrendered—and agreed to sell Man’s Country.

“Land is premium in Andersonville, and Man’s Country occupies a lot of land,” said Chuck. “They’ll probably tear it down and build condos.”

“Real estate taxes killed Man’s Country,” said Ron Ehrenheim, “the agribusinesses and the local businesses.”

Chuck died June 29, 2017, at age 87. Following the two Loose Ends parties in November 2017 and New Year’s Eve 2018, auctioners dismantled and sold the property. Items included lockers (sold in blocks of 10),_toilet seats, lights, artwork, membership cards, sheers (sold in $5 grab bags), room doors, slings, metal bars, the St. Andrew’s cross, and glory holes. Some items were donated to the Leather Archives & Museum. It was the last scavenger hunt, long-time members even salvaged bricks from the demolished ruins.

The space was that sacred.

“Stop it. You can’t touch the Man’s Country. It was a comfort. No matter what was going on in the outside world, this other place was here for rent six hours at a time. It had changed, and yet it really didn’t. Behind these walls, guys could have the fun they needed to have, do what they wanted to do, and then go about their business. That freedom meant something.”

“If you left Man’s Country, and you didn’t have a good time—it was your own damn fault.”

Man’s Country: More Than a Bathhouse is now available from independent booksellers everywhere.
At the Intersection of Health, Housing & Immigration

Erica López, Executive Director of Centro de Derecho de la Gente (Peoples Law Center), shares how her own journey led her to advocating for the rights of undocumented immigrants.

I AM LATINX, a mother, the daughter of immigrants, a lawyer, an advocate, and I am queer. I am the literal face of the American dream. I will tell my own story to find my calling at the intersection of immigration, health, family, and housing.

Immigration is a big part of the story of our country; it’s also a big part of my story. My story begins with my parents. In Hidalgo, Mexico, they each lived on rural farms replete with outhouses and outdoor kitchens. They had no access to education, and thus had limited options for work. My parents came to this country without permission to fulfill their American dream. I could say they were undocumented or illegal, but I use “people first” language, as we are all people first, before any identity we hold or is thrust upon us. Language is important, and no one is just illegal or just undocumented.

I grew up in Chula Vista, CA where the cultural border is far more permeable than the expense of the barbed wall. At night, I could see Tijuana’s glittering lights illuminating the desert hills. It felt like I inhabited two countries, never feeling fully Mexican or fully American.

My parents’ sacrifices included my dad standing all day, inhaling metal dust while working in a metal finishing factory so that I could go to Yale College, attend law school, and teach at UW Law School. One night, I opened a nonprofit law firm that represents mostly Latinx immigrants; I felt as though I was collecting pieces of myself.

During my research, people in interviews repeatedly said that they needed lawyers. Instead of staying in research, I decided to become a lawyer. When I was at Boston Medical Center, I learned about the connection between housing and health. Before becoming a lawyer, I was an immigration and education research assistant. After graduating from Yale, I helped conduct a qualitative study on other social service safety nets like shelters, health care, foster care, and jails.

IMMIGRANTS MAKE OUR COUNTRY GREAT, BUT WITHOUT A PATH TO CITIZENSHIP, THEY FACE CONSTANT EXPLOITATION

Many LGBTQ+ people migrate to the United States because their home countries are unsafe due to war, persecution, and lack of economic opportunity. LGBTQ immigrants experience violence and discrimination at home because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This explains why transgender individuals disproportionately represent LGBTQ asylum-seekers in the U.S.

Immigrants that do not have legal status are disproportionately from Latin America. Immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador make up 70 percent of the undocumented population nationally. In the U.S., an estimated 22 percent of the LGBTQ immigrant population is undocumented and approximately 4.7% of the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) population are LGBTQ.

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Many LGBTQ+ people migrate to the United States because their home countries are unsafe due to war, persecution, and lack of economic opportunity. LGBTQ immigrants experience violence and discrimination at home because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This explains why transgender individuals disproportionately represent LGBTQ asylum-seekers in the U.S.

Immigrants that do not have legal status are disproportionately from Latin America. Immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador make up 70 percent of the undocumented population nationally. In the U.S., an estimated 22 percent of the LGBTQ immigrant population is undocumented and approximately 4.7% of the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) population are LGBTQ.

During my research, people in interviews said that they needed lawyers. Instead of staying in research, I decided to become a lawyer. When I was at Boston Medical Center, I learned about the connection between housing and health. Before becoming a lawyer, I was an immigration and education research assistant. After graduating from Yale, I helped conduct a qualitative study on other social service safety nets like shelters, health care, foster care, and jails.
At Goodman’s, love is the most important thing!

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ReachFarther

OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Pantry has nearly doubled in size over the past year, adding new programs and expanding existing ones. The center’s program director, A.J. Hardie, details the impact.

ONE A WEEK. Annmarie Preece, a longtime volunteer at OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center, stops by the River Food Pantry on her way to her front desk volunteer shift. Annmarie loads up the trunk of her car with all manner of foods; like pasta, rice, and canned goods and personal care supplies like soap, laundry detergent, and socks to help fill OutReach’s Community Pantry.

OutReach’s partnership with the River Food Pantry started in November 2021 with a pantry that fit into two cabinets by the front door to our main office and has since expanded to an entire kitchen with multiple shelving units, a refrigerator, and a standing freezer. Each week, the River sends over enough non-perishable foods and personal care items to keep our Community Pantry well stocked for anyone who drops in to use it. The River also supports our annual events by donating snacks and goods for our Trans Care Package Program, Trans Roy Event, and the Magic Pride Festival.

As the cost of food and household goods has risen, use of the Community Pantry has also increased, and we’ve been fortunate to have had numerous churches, local businesses, and community groups also donate food and personal care essentials to the Pantry.

One of the things that sets OutReach’s Community Pantry apart from others is how deliberately low-barrier we’ve kept it. We understand that having to show things like a state ID can create an additional barrier for some, especially trans folks whose documents may not show the correct name or gender. The River Food Pantry has had numerous churches, local businesses, and community groups also donate food and personal care essentials to the Pantry.

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Pantry has coincided both with our growth as an organization and with growth in the needs of our community. Dane County’s LGBTQ+ community has to contend with some of the fastest rising housing costs in the country on top of rising food costs, and these things impact people in the LGBTQ+ community differently based on the intersections of other identities like race, age, ability, education, and others. With new programs focused on harm reduction and housing, we’re building in our community meeting these basic needs and build connections to a broader community of resources and support.

OutReach Programs & Contact Information

- Elder Services: For LGBTQ+ adults over age 50 looking for social and educational events, help finding safe and affirming housing, and peer connections. Contact Kristi M. at KristiM@lgbtoutreach.org.
- Transgender Services: For transgender and nonbinary people looking for connections to community, help navigating health care and legal processes, and low or no-cost gender affirming clothing items. Contact Gabriol Lenardo, Gabriol@lgbtoutreach.org
- Young Adult Housing Program: For young adults (age 17.5-24) who need help finding and/or paying for housing, building life skills, and connecting with community supports. Contact DaMontae January at DaMontae@lgbtoutreach.org.
- Harm Reduction and Recovery Services: Information and training about safer drug use including how to administer Narcan/Naloxone, distribution of safer drug use and safer sex kits, peer support and LGBTQ-affirming recovery meetings. For education, kits, and recovery meet- ing information contact Tarah Stangler at TarahS@lgbtoutreach.org.
- Willma’s Fund: Emergency, short-term financial assistance for LGBTQ+ adults in Dane County. For more information, call OutReach or email A.J. at A.J@lgbtoutreach.org.

OutReach has been able to expand our support services for people who use alcohol and other drugs by creating a harm reduction team focused on peer support, community outreach, and education. Harm reduction is inherently queer approach to substance use that arose from programs like needle exchanges created to help stop the spread of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. Our harm reduction program aims to provide support for people who use alcohol and other drugs without judgment and with the under- standing that there are many ways to build healthier relationships with alcohol and other drugs. Tarah Stangler, the lead staff person of the harm reduction team, views the goals of OutReach’s harm reduction programming as “closing gaps and overcoming barriers to care for queer people who use drugs so that they have access to holistic and affirming care.”

Tarah, Linda Lenardo, and Kaedan Watford make up OutReach’s harm reduction team and work within the Queer Care Collective (formerly the Pride in Prevention Coalition) to ensure that community members and local organizations have access to harm reduction services.

For more information, call OutReach or email A.J. at A.J@lgbtoutreach.org.

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education and supplies. Our team assembles and distributes safer sex kits (including condoms, lube, or other items), safer drug use kits, wound care and first aid kits, safer smoking kits, and overdose response kits. Team members also lead Narcan (Naloxone) trainings for organizations who would like to have staff on hand that can safely respond to overdoses, and facilitates harm reduction and recovery meetings weekly.

Since 2020, the amount of assistance given out through Willma’s Fund has grown by 500%. In 2022 alone, OutReach staff provided financial assistance to 110 people and gave out approximately $50,000 in grants.

Also in 2022, OutReach became a partner in the City of Madison’s Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP). Led by the Dane County Youth Action Board (YAB), the YHDP is a youth-driven project aimed at reducing the number of young adults (aged 17.5–24) experiencing homelessness in Madison and Dane County. OutReach’s goal in partnering with the YAB and other local organizations is to ensure that young adults experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness, a large portion of whom are part of the LGBTQ+ community, have access to the care and resources they need.

OutReach’s harm reduction and young adult housing programs complement our existing work with Willma’s Fund, which has been a lifeline for many in Dane County’s LGBTQ+ community experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness since 2011. Willma’s Fund, like our other services, dramatically expanded both during and following the Covid-19 public health emergency.

Increased demand for services

Since 2020, the amount of assistance given out through Willma’s Fund has grown by 500%. In 2022 alone, OutReach staff provided financial assistance to 110 people and gave out approximately $50,000 in grants to individuals to pay for things like rent, security deposits, short-term hotel stays, and utilities. Demand for Willma’s Fund has only increased in 2023, to the extent that in several months OutReach exceeded our monthly budget for assistance within a matter of days. Willma’s Fund has now provided over $300,000 in assistance to more than 500 people.

Some of our long-running programs are also more active than ever. The YHDP, a joint program of OutReach and the Madison Senior Center, continues to host events for LGBTQ+ elders and build connections with national organizations like SAGE and AARP.

OutReach’s Elder Advocate, Kristi, is working with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to create supportive services for LGBTQ+ elders with memory loss and their caregivers, a program that will be starting in 2024.

OutReach’s Transgender Advocate, Gabriel Loredo, has also been working to expand OutReach’s financial and material support programs for transgender, non-binary, and gender expansive folks. Gabriel put together OutReach’s Trans Closet, stocked with donated clothing and other gender affirming clothing, and has been administering grants covering the cost of legal name changes and document updates for trans folks. We’re also incredibly excited to be partnering with OPEN Foundation on additional services for transgender folks that will be available in 2024.
A Next-gen Experience in Walker’s Point

Recently opened POP is Milwaukee’s first new gay bar since 2010.

Across America, gay bars have been closing at an astonishing rate. Over the past 20 years, Milwaukee has lost its longest-running icons: Ball Game (38 years), C’est La Vie (34 years), M&M Club (30 years), and Club 219 (24 years). The national prognosis is chilling. Between 2012 and 2021, over half of the gay bars in the country closed. Lesbian bars have been decimated: Walker’s Point is one of only 25 remaining in the nation.

Consider this mass exodus, it’s exciting to see a new gay bar open anywhere. But it is especially exciting to see a landmark address “reclaimed” by the community—with an exciting and energetic vision.

On September 8, POP celebrated its grand opening at 124 W. National Avenue, formerly home to Switch. Make no mistake: This is not your 20th century gay bar. POP has replaced the traditional Milwaukee tavern ambiance with a bright, colorful explosion of sights and sounds. And no, they won’t be resurrecting those foam parties.

He envisioned opening a new kind of bar. One that served art, entertainment, and community in a neighborhood space. But he wanted to be clear: It needed to be a gay bar, first and foremost.

“You’re not the first person to ask,” said Marcus Wise, who owns and operates POP with partner Daniel Patterson. “That was then, this is now. Due to expansions and renovations, the Switch patio no longer exists.”

“Historically, a lot of gay bars were crowded, dark, secretive, anonymous places to protect people’s safety,” said Wise. “But we’re making a loud and proud statement. We’re bright, we’re spacious, we’re colorful. Our doors and windows are always open. We have no reason to hide.”

Originally from Buffalo, NY, Wise has extensive experience in the entertainment and service industries. His first jobs were working in restaurants, following in the footsteps of his father (a chef) and his mother (a bar/restaurant worker). He’s owned multiple art galleries in New York, and was the Buzz Social family entertainment center in Green Bay.

After eight years in Wisconsin, Wise felt the decline of gay bar culture firsthand. Over time, he envisioned opening a new kind of bar: One that served art, entertainment, and community in a neighborhood space. But he wanted to be clear: It needed to be a gay bar, first and foremost.

“I understand why there’s not as much demand for gay bars today,” said Wise. “We have more opportunities to be out now. But, on the other hand, there is still a need for safe spaces. Just because most of our population might be out and proud, doesn’t mean that everybody is ready to be out and proud. We’re also seeing so much hatred and discrimination right now. We cannot honestly say we don’t need gay bars. I hope that we are moving closer to a world where anyone can feel safe anywhere, but we are not there now.”

“Over time, our space will evolve as it evolves. But I want to create a safe space that makes room for everyone.”

POP is not just a bar, but a full-service restaurant with a clever, seven-day menu, including weekend brunches and “fast casual” hand foods the rest of the week.

“We hired a great kitchen manager who is really killing it,” said Wise. “This helps us serve the community. When you can eat tasty food right here; you don’t need to leave to find a quality meal.”

“As I like to say, drink with one hand—and eat with the other.”

Wise also hopes to flex his arts and entertainment background to create an ever-changing vibe.

“We’re creating a space for people who love to go out and have fun,” said Wise. “I built this bar because something was missing in Milwaukee. We are creating a space where you can watch videos at the bar, or grab a snack, or watch a Packer game, or RuPaul’s Drag Race, or meet friends for weekday happy hours, or bring the family for brunch. We’ll have drag shows, but we’re not a drag bar. We’ll have DJs, but we’re not a dance club. And we look forward to partnering with our neighbors in Walker’s Point on bar crawls and neighborhood events. We’ve got so many exciting things coming up in fall and winter. We’ll be trying new concepts, listening to our customers, and seeing what our community really wants and needs.”

“We’re creating a space for people who like what they like—and aren’t afraid to say so.”

POP is open 4:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. Monday through Friday and 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 a.m. on Saturday and Sundays. Kitchen menus and reservations are now available online. For ongoing news and event updates, follow them on Facebook and Instagram.
Reclaiming Queer Joy

For Cameron Craig, navigating their way out meant finding, the right spaces and language to feel safe. And now they’re advocating for others on similar journeys.

Growing up in a polarizing political landscape, with transgender rights under attack at every waking moment, people feel as though they have a right to how it’s impacted you. The world would rather hear stories of queer pain: the time classmates had bribed friends to out me, the time a teacher outright refused to use my pronouns because I was out sick too frequently, the people telling me I’m “going to hell” for wearing a “You Are Loved” shirt.

Cisgender heterosexuals try to justify their obligation to hear the trauma of marginalized communities by claiming it’ll help them feel inspired to advocate for us. They don’t have that right. Instead, I’ll take it upon myself to share experiences of queer joy, something that may be less interesting to those not in our community, but something we are so desperately deserving of hearing.

I’ve known I was in the queer community for as long as I’ve had memories, but I didn’t have the vocabulary to tell anyone. Luckily, I didn’t need them for a while; however, in middle school, when everyone started exploring relationships and their own romantic interests, the words were becoming more and more necessary to me. I needed a way to identify how differently I’d been feeling. These words were introduced to me through our GSA, a place where everybody was welcome, where everyone belonged. They gave me the words I had only heard in hushed whispers and told me that being gay wasn’t something you had to be quiet about. Really, they sparked my interest in LGBTQ+ activism and advocacy.

Months later, I finally told the world I wasn’t straight, starting with bisexual and eventually correcting to “lesbian” a few months after that, in the first classroom I’d been in with an LGBTQ+ teacher: French. French class was a utopia for me, an incredible place where gender neutral language was ingrained in the curriculum, identity was celebrated, and where you could be honest without fear of consequence. These days, I still wish I could go back to the freedom and representation of people like me that my Mme. Deyo had let us feel, and with the majority of my current college-level French classmates coming from the same middle school, I feel they must, too.

During the pandemic, I had by far one of my favorite coming out experiences, because nobody even took it as coming out. All I had to do was add my pronouns to my zoom name, and allow the world to play identity-catch up. I was able to hear the first adults in my life call me by the right pronouns, without making it a movie-moment. I let the world catch up without an announcement. It was gratifying to hear people refer to me properly without ever giving them a chance to question it.

Starting high school, I’ve gone back to my middle school, directing plays and musicals alongside my former teachers and mentors. Larger than any political win, I find the joy I feel in that space to be exhilarating. Introducing myself with “they/them” pronouns, I always see a few young actors with an excited, joyous face, finally seeing someone who’d been through what they’re going through and emerging on the other end, understanding and proud of their identity. They’re even more joyful when my girlfriend comes to help out, seeing two nonbinary students, similarly identifying to many of them, who’ve found confidence despite the alarming effects of the school system. To know that just by existing proudly, I’ve instilled them with a glimmer of hope they’ll get through everything bringing them down, I find myself beaming. The smile only grows when they get to share their own true selves onstage and offstage.

There’s an incredible amount of positives in our community, something that simply cannot be expressed in even an endless amount of words. While many come from connections with others, there’s a lot of euphoria within the individual aspects of queer joy, too. I find nothing more pleasing than when an outfit gives off the perfect expression of “femme, but not feminine,” and I think that eyeliner is the most affirming makeup product to exist. The individual doses of happiness aren’t to be ignored, and for many of us, they’re the most common ways of experiencing queer joy.

The world asks us to share our pain. Often, it takes sharing traumatic experiences for our voices to be heard. For our country, this is sometimes necessary for the greater political and social success of the LGBTQ+ community. But it is critical that we receive chances and spaces for true queer joy. So today, I implore you to choose queer joy, and I promise I’ll do the same. We, and our entire community, are so much more than the trauma and pain we’re forced to share with the world.
At UW Health, we’re committed to delivering inclusive, affirming healthcare in a supportive environment. And, we’re proud to be recognized as a leader in LGBTQ+ Healthcare Equality Index by the Human Rights Campaign.