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November / December 2024

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“Life doesn’t get easier or more forgiving; we get stronger and more resilient.”

- Steve Maraboli

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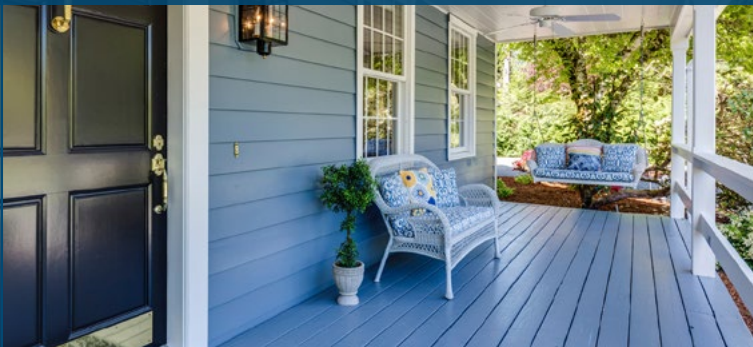
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PUBLISHER'S LETTER

PATRICK FARABAUGH



HERE WE GO AGAIN



"Action is the antidote to despair."

—Joan Baez

BUCKLE UP. We're in for an extremely challenging four years. While a significant percentage of Americans are bracing themselves for what harm is on the horizon, few will be impacted as significantly as the LGBTQ community. Republicans spent at least \$215 million on TV ads attacking trans rights in the 2024 election. The ACLU is tracking 558 anti-LGBTQ bills in the U.S. right now, and that number is certain to continue to rise. The permission structure Trump creates will allow for everyday discrimination and absolutely contribute to more violence towards our community. It will be a challenge to not be overwhelmed. During Trump's first administration the frequency with which *Our Lives* was targeted went off the charts. I'm mentally preparing for that to return. It's hard at times to not get lost in feelings of despair.

Over the next four years I expect us to need each other more and lean on each other more. We got through this once, and we will again— together. I find myself looking for any silver linings I can find. And one I've found my mind frequently drifting to is the old adage, diamonds are forged under pressure. The lessons we will learn, and hardships we'll endure, and resources we'll build will make us more connected, more resilient, and more committed to our shared values than any other time.

Please, use *Our Lives* as a resource. Reach out to us and tell us what you need and how you can help. If you have something you think is useful to share, use this platform to help others access that information. While despair is understandable, I feel compelled to act in whatever way will help my community. I also understand if safety for you right now means laying low. In that case, I encourage you to lean on the magazine to not feel so alone in the world, and as a tool to draw inspiration from. The day will come when you'll feel safe and ready to more openly engage.

I also want to use this space to publicly say thank you to everyone who doesn't shy away from funding the work we're doing. It's essential, and what matters most is those who stand with us through the tough times, when it isn't easy or popular to support our community. This magazine is funded entirely through the ads you see on our pages. When it's possible, please patronize these businesses as a way to support our work, and their willingness to keep our lights on while we do this work.

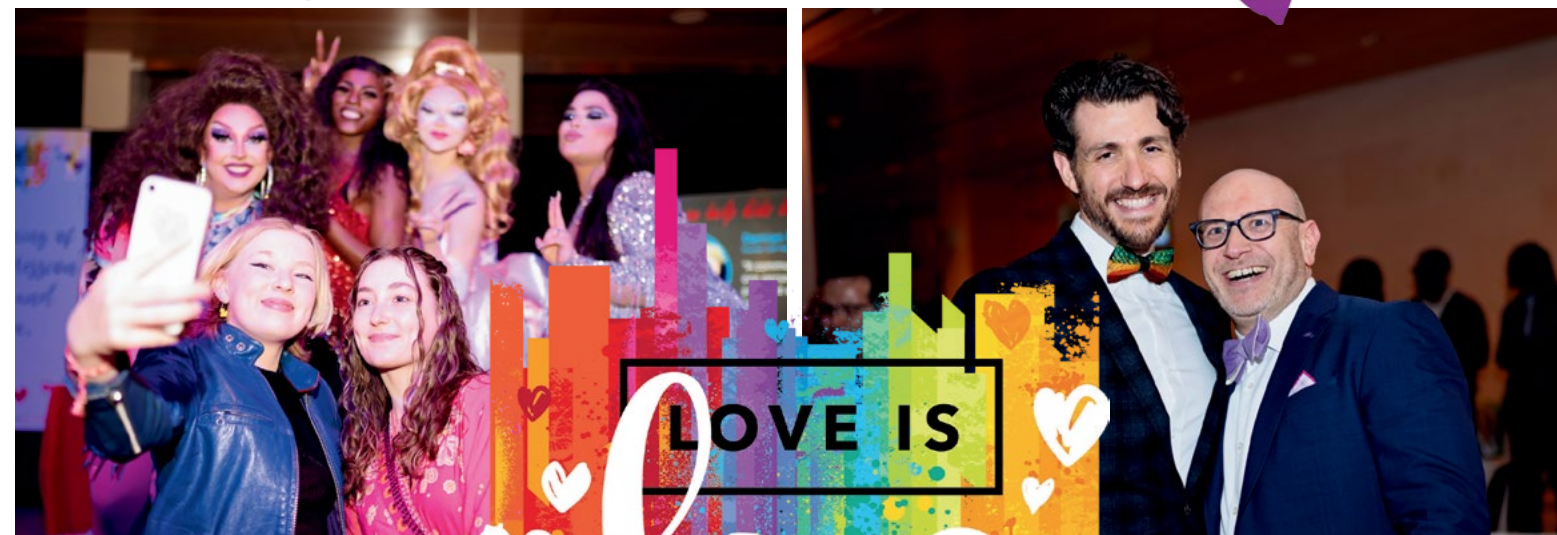
I'm grateful to be doing this work with all of you. ■



2025 Love List

Help us recognize and celebrate Wisconsin's LGBTQ relationships by submitting your relationship for inclusion in our January 2025 issue.

ourliveswisconsin.com/lovelist



Madison's most joyful and vibrant celebration returns!

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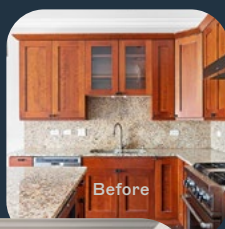


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OUR LIVES MEDIA UPDATE

GREG WRIGHT



OUR LIVES LAUNCHES A NONPROFIT AND STATEWIDE DIGITAL ARCHIVE



THIS PAST SUMMER, Our Lives Media was awarded a federal grant through the National Archives that is funding a digital archive of Wisconsin's first-in-the-nation gay rights legislation. In 1982, Wisconsin became the first state in the U.S. to offer legal protections to gay and lesbian residents. This archive will increase accessibility to researchers, storytellers, and general residents seeking to learn more about and from this legislative accomplishment.

We are deep in the process of building out that website and loading it with the thousands of documents we discovered through this process. It has been an honor to sort through those files. Through that process, we have deepened our own understanding of queer history in Wisconsin. We also started to see a better path forward.

The grant required *Our Lives* to launch a nonprofit. In doing so, it gave us the opportunity to think about our own structure. We are watching many media companies, especially those centered on marginalized populations, transition to nonprofit structures. The shift reduces the reliance on ad revenues, which often encourage publications to prioritize content based on proximity to those advertisers. Instead, it opens up more opportunities to tell stories of the highest impact and need.

For *Our Lives*, we see this as a necessary step to help us lean into our statewide impact. *Our Lives* launched during the fight for marriage equality based on information that suggested many Wisconsin residents didn't know anyone from the queer community. The magazine sought to make the everyday lives of our sizable community more visible to residents of all types living in all places in Wisconsin. Much of that initial storytelling focused on Madison, as the publication was located there. Over time, though, issues of *Our Lives* have featured content from Madeline Island to Beloit and La Crosse to Door County.

We live out our best mission when we are telling the stories of queer and trans residents from every corner of the state. While LGBTQIA+ visibility has grown, there are still many places where the community's contributions remain unrecognized by the towns and cities that people call home. With our website's built-in search features, we can also target information by region, helping people access important news, job listings, events, and other content.

It is hard enough to keep any news organization afloat these days. It is hard, even in Madison, to keep a queer media company afloat. By working statewide, we strengthen the magazine's sustainability while also connecting more people to the larger statewide community. We hope, over time, that people living in even the smallest of towns with the least resources feel connected, supported, and seen through our work.

We are in the early stages of building out the structure for this statewide nonprofit. It is exciting work, but it is work that needs the right connections across the state. We are starting our work there, mapping out the network of people who know and share our community's most impactful stories. Our best path forward is in equipping those people with the right tools to support their existing work.

If you are someone with boots on the ground or you know someone who wears them, please reach out to us to join in these planning conversations. Email us at contact@ourliveswisconsin.com to get connected.

Our Lives published its 100th edition this year. We can't wait to see what the next 100 have in store. ■

OBITUARY



LUCÍA NUÑEZ was many: Cuban, Latina, daughter, sister, mother, partner, educator, activist, advocate. She was also one of Madison's LGBTQ changemakers. Sadly, she passed away September 30, in Madison.

Lucía was born January 3, 1960, in Cuba.

While middle-class Cubans had a "wait and see" approach after the 1959 revolution, her parents were concerned with an increased Soviet presence, as well as rumors that Cuban children were being taken to Russia for re-education.

After leaving Cuba in 1965, they spent three months in Spain waiting for U.S. visas, only to return to New York and be routed back to the U.S. Navy base at Guantanamo Bay.

Upon arrival, the now-refugees were denied U.S. citizenship while living outside U.S. territory. In 1970, they moved to Florida for three months, and then to St. Thomas, where her parents would remain until 2005.

Lucía's experiences would shape her understanding of identity for the rest of her life.

"It wasn't until my early twenties that I really understood what identity meant: acceptance of myself and my family."

In 1985, she joined the Peace Corps to support women, children, and schools in Honduras, and continued advocating for immigrant youth while working at Stanford University.

After scouting locations from Oregon to New York, Lucía relocated her family to Wisconsin in 1999. She joined Centro Hispano as executive director. She also served as deputy director of the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, administrator of the State of Wisconsin Equal Rights Division, and the first director of the City of Madison Department of Civil Rights. From 2016 until her retirement, she was the vice president of equity, inclusion, and community engagement at Madison Area Technical College.

Lucía is survived by Heidi Vargas, her wife of 35 years, and their two children, Carina Vargas-Nuñez, and Mateo Vargas-Nuñez. ■

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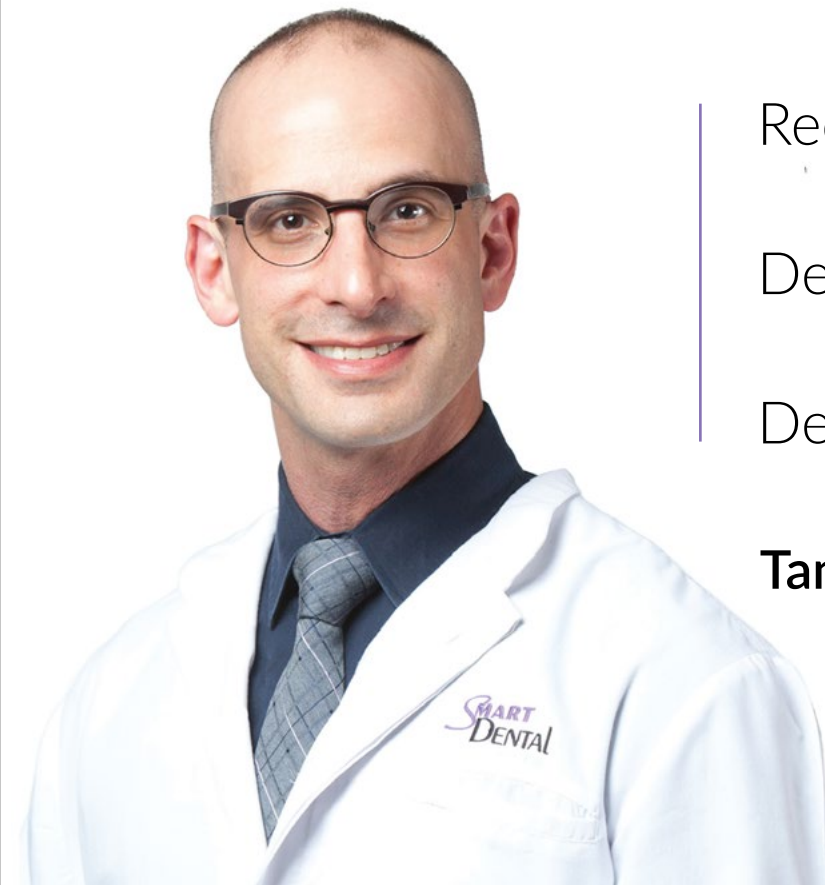
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The Fight Over Title IX

An increasing number of **Wisconsin school districts** are creating Title IX violations that threaten safety, well-being, and survival of trans youth. **Fair Wisconsin** and **GSAFE** are taking action.

NEWS | POLITICS & LAW | TITLE IX | SCHOOL BOARDS | PARENTAL RIGHTS | TRANS & NONBINARY STUDENTS

WHEN GSAFE AND FAIR WISCONSIN filed a joint Title IX complaint against the Kettle Moraine School District on September 10, they warned that they would be watching—and would file additional complaints against other Wisconsin school districts violating the federal civil rights of LGBTQ students.

On October 9, they delivered on their promise. Four additional complaints were filed on behalf of, and in support of, transgender and nonbinary students and their families. The school districts of Winneconne, Muskego Norway, Hartford Union, and Abbotsford were

cited for fostering hostile environments that violate Title IX protections.

DEFENDING THE RIGHTS OF TRANS & NONBINARY STUDENTS

“When we filed the complaint against Kettle Moraine School District, we said we would file more complaints if we needed to. We are doing exactly that. And we will keep filing complaints to support trans and nonbinary students and their families until these actions stop,” said Tyrone Creech, executive director of GSAFE.

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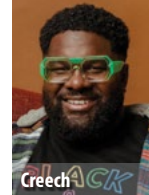


“Each of these districts is doing this a different way,” said Abigail Swetz, executive director of Fair Wisconsin, “but the actions range between making very pointed anti-transgender statements during board meetings, to receiving public commentary and calls to action and taking no action, to eliminating or vetoing gender identity language from Title IX policies in schools.”

On August 1, new federal regulations clarified that sexual discrimination included gender identity. However, these school boards—and others—have not taken proactive action to include this language. In fact, some have taken the hostile action of removing the language. As a result, these districts are out of compliance with federal law.

HOSTILITY AT SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS

School boards are fostering hostility in several ways, and it can be seen in board meetings broadcast on Zoom or recorded on YouTube. When parents are advocating for safety, they’re treated to ridicule, hostility, and discriminatory votes in real time. Their concerns are actively dismissed or ignored. In some cases, board members have denied trans existence, i.e., stating that trans women are not



women. Some districts have attempted to create “separate but equal” policies for trans and nonbinary students, rather than just creating universal policies for all.

“By doing this, these school boards are sending the message that trans and nonbinary students are not worthy of protection,” said Swetz. “Creating a hostile environment for them creates a hostile environment for every kid. Our children are watching, and when school boards weaponize the identities of some of our most vulnerable children, we must take action to stop them. That is an unconscionable action for duly elected leaders entrusted with the education and safety of our children. We are here to say it’s not only unacceptable, but also discriminatory. We must show the children of Wisconsin that we are ready to protect their rights and ensure their safety.”

“We’re hoping to change things,” said Creech. “In a perfect world, we wouldn’t be needed—but that’s not the reality of where we are. We want people to know we are paying attention. We hope school boards wake up.”

“These school boards can still do the right thing,” said Swetz. “Federal complaints take a long time, so this will be a lengthy process, which gives them the time to fix it. They have the power, and they could and should use it.”

PARENTAL RIGHTS

Unfortunately, GSAFE and Fair Wisconsin are up against a small-but-loud group lobbying around “parental rights.” Ironically, both organizations agree with the holistic concept of parental rights.

“Every parent should have the right to know their child is safe at school,” said Creech. “You have parental rights over your child, but not the right to impose your beliefs on other families. That’s when we lose our freedoms, and that’s what ‘parental rights’ groups forget. This isn’t about one family making determinations for every family in the district. It’s about creating policies that encompass all students and make all students feel welcome. The students don’t care if these kids are trans, it’s the parents. They are the only ones who care. Hate is taught not bred. Hate is not in our DNA, we learn it.”

“People don’t like federal complaints being filed against them,” said Swetz. “Our work is having a deterrent effect in a good way.”

CONTACT THE TIP LINE

“As we speak, the ball is in the court of the U.S. Department of Education Department of Civil Rights,” said Swetz, “but the ball is also in the court of the school board at any given moment. They could call a special session and resolve these federal complaints in one meeting. Right now, it’s a waiting game.”

In the meantime, citizens are encouraged to contact the Tip Line at testimony@fairwisconsin.com.

“Some of the complaints we filed came through that Tip Line. It’s really helped us know where to look for verifiable information. With more than 400 school districts in Wisconsin, we can’t track everything without it.”

The Tip Line has been an important buffer for families and students.

“We can protect the people who are blowing these whistles,” said Creech, “and prevent

them from putting themselves on the line. We don’t want to put that weight on anyone else, and we don’t want to create any more harm for educators, parents, or students. They’re already been through enough.”

“If you need support, reach out for support through the Tip Line,” said Swetz. “We’ll give you talking points. We’ll help you prepare for your next school board meeting. We’ll give you all the statistics you need.”

“But you do need to show up,” said Creech. “You can’t be an ally from your armchair. You need to show up in the real world. We are not going anywhere, and if you’re trying to abuse our community, we’re going to just keep on fighting. From the earliest days of our community, we’ve never shied away from the battle. And the most important battle right now is helping kids survive.” ■

NEWS BRIEFS

WRITTEN BY MELANIE JONES

ACLU OF WISCONSIN PUBLISHES A GUIDE TO NAVIGATE OUR CURRENT CLIMATE

AS THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY faces right-wing legislatures and activists attempting to curtail students from using bathrooms of their correct gender and playing sports on teams that match their gender identity, and as teachers face more pushback from radicalized school boards and parent groups, the ACLU of Wisconsin has put together a Wisconsin-specific guide to navigate the current climate. This guide, aimed at students, their parents, and teachers, outlines what rights each group has, what to do if those rights are limited, and where to find help.

For students, the guide outlines what rights they have in regard to “speaking out,” outlining petitions, social media use, civil disobedience, what can happen as a result of said actions, and what specific rights student journalists have. Students have a right, they outline, to “express their opinions through protest and other forms of speech, even if their views are controversial or make other students, staff, or faculty uncomfortable.” But they continue that “school administrators can intervene if the student’s expressive activities interfere with the school’s operation or the rights of other students. The mere suspicion that speech might disrupt the classroom, though, is not enough.” The guide continues with outlining rights about, and possible challenges to, pronouns, names, and bathroom usage. They state that while students do have the right to use restrooms and locker rooms consistent with their gender identity, “laws that support the rights of LGBTQ+

students are facing many legal challenges from transphobic and homophobic organizations and are subject to change.”

After detailing the rights of students, teachers, and parents with regard to clubs, book bans, and bullying, the guide outlines the structure of governance both for school districts, the state, and the federal government, as well as how rules and laws come to be. The ACLU details the role of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, who they are led by, and what their responsibilities are, and includes a flowchart of the Wisconsin Legislative Process Review. Crucially for parents especially, the guide ends by outlining the process for school boards, what their roles are, how to navigate the school board website, how to participate in meetings, and how to reach members if they have a concern or issue.

While not exhaustive in all of the rights of students, teachers, and parents, this toolkit is an approachable way to start understanding how to navigate those rights and how to advocate for them in an environment that has become increasingly hostile to the LGBTQ+ community.

CDC ANNOUNCES NEW FOCUS ON LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY AND OTHER MINORITIES

THE CDC HAS ANNOUNCED a new “agency-wide strategy” focusing on the LGBTQ+ community and other minorities with the hopes of closing some of the gaps in care among those of different races, genders, and sexual orientations. The agency only stated that they were making this structural change, not what those chang-



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es would entail in tangible terms within the organization. The CDC acknowledges on their website that the LGBTQ+ community has experienced discrimination with regard to medical care, outlining how the continued stigma within the medical community has negatively impacted community members and their health. The CDC's Office of Health Equity's mission is "To ensure health equity is embedded in an all-of-

public health approach to overcoming persistent health disparities and health inequities across a range of population groups that disproportionately experience poor health outcomes." Their director will be at the forefront of this new strategy. As soon as more information comes available about what this will look like in the real world among our intersectional communities, we will share an update. ■

LGBTQ Organizations Update

General News | Awards | Staff & Board Changes | Events

Curated by **Doug Rowe**

GENERAL NEWS

Important notes about area LGBTQ groups.

BADGERLAND PRIDE SOFTBALL League has announced that the Gay Softball World Series, which is the largest annual LGBTQ+ single-sport athletic competition in the world, will be held in relatively close Columbus, Ohio. More than 230 teams and 5,000 athletes are

expected to attend. Columbus is also hosting the 11th annual Stonewall National Tournament & Summit on July 17–20, 2025. That event is expected to draw more than 4,500 people for competitions ranging from dodgeball and volleyball to bocce and billiards.

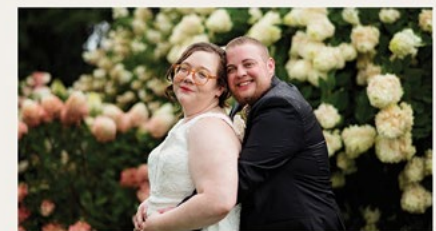
Columbus is home to the largest Pride parade in the Midwest attracting more than 500,000 people and is a recipient of a perfect score by the Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equality Index (MEI). Columbus also plays host to several inclusive annual events, including the Gay and Lesbian Tennis Alliance Columbus Classic, Labor of Love Volleyball Classic, and Columbus Lesbian and Gay Softball Association's Buckeye Softball Classic and fundraising Bat-N-Rouge event.

COURAGE MKE volunteers Jamie, Beth, Kelly, Angelo, and Jacob joined with #bairdgivesback to pick up 33 bags of trash from the banks of the Milwaukee River.

FAIR WISCONSIN talked to more than 130,000 Wisconsin voters about LGBTQ+ rights in advance of the November election via text-banks. You can contact them to join in and text voters for future elections.

FREEDOM, INC. in partnership with @Butterfly-Collective and others is fundraising for a mobile care and collaborative van with a goal of \$15,000. Four grassroots initiatives will work collectively to manage/share a multi-purpose van for direct service and support.

LGBT BOOKS TO PRISONERS announced in September that they have been barred from sending books to those incarcerated by the Wisconsin



NOW BOOKING FOR 2024/2025

Melanie Renee

PHOTOGRAPHY

melaniereneephotography.com

Department of Corrections. Wisconsin books to prisoners has been sending reading materials since 2006 and in that time has delivered over 70k books. DOC administrator Sarah Cooper cited concerns that bad actors impersonating other organizations may use mailings to sneak contraband into facilities.

OPEN FOUNDATION is providing two scholarships, offering access to eCornell professional certificate programs aimed at LGBTQ+ individuals interested in advancing their careers. eCornell's comprehensive selection of more than 150 certificate programs spans various disciplines, including leadership, project management, and diversity and inclusion, allowing recipients to choose the course that best aligns with their professional goals.

PATHFINDERS is seeking help with Housing Kits. Looking for an easy and meaningful volunteer project? Help assemble "Welcome Home Kits" for youth transitioning from homelessness into their first apartments. Moving in is an exciting step for our young people. However, without everyday items, simple tasks such as taking a shower or cooking a meal remain a luxury. Housing kits equip our youth with the basics to function in their homes.

PROUD THEATER MADISON performed two 45-minute sessions at the Alliance for Wisconsin Theater Educators Conference for educators from all over the state. They will also perform at the statewide Wisconsin One-act Festival in Milwaukee in November. They are seeking partners to explore restarting a Milwaukee chapter of the program.

AWARDS / RECOGNITION / GRANTS

Special thanks for those who do good.

BAY AREA COUNCIL ON GENDER DIVERSITY celebrated seven years of existence in October. On October 5, 2017 four people gathered in what was then the storage room attached to the back of the Napalese Lounge to support one another, tell some stories, and laugh. The Council shares gratitude to everyone who has supported us and cried and laughed with us along the way.

CREAM CITY FOUNDATION is excited to announce the recipients of the 2024 Scholarship Program after another strong year of applications. This year 20 Milwaukee-area LGBTQ+ students were selected to each receive a \$2,500 scholarship totaling \$50,000 in awards. The LGBTQ+ Scholarship Program was founded in 2015 to support LGBTQ+ student leaders in Southeastern Wisconsin. Scholarships can be

used for any post-secondary education at the undergraduate, graduate, or postgraduate level. Since 2015 the program has awarded over \$270,000 to local students:

- **Bee Becker**, Carthage College
- **Isaiah Purpor**, Marquette University
- **Felicia Leflore**, Milwaukee Area Technical College
- **Undisclosed Recipient**, MIAD
- **Angel Bertholf**, MIAD
- **Undisclosed Recipient**, Mount Mary University
- **Jen Janviere**, Mount Mary University
- **Paris Throne**, Mount Mary University
- **Mary Jane Juem**, Bellin College
- **Leah Pena**, University of Iowa
- **Lin Sophie Haggerty**, UW-Milwaukee
- **ER Bennett**, UW-Milwaukee
- **Faythe Brennan**, UW-Milwaukee
- **Alaska Grey**, UW-Milwaukee
- **Sal Prado**, UW-Milwaukee
- **Rylie Cha**, UW-Milwaukee
- **Nat Hayes**, UW-Milwaukee
- **Melissa Hidalgo Jimenez**, UW-Milwaukee
- **Lauren Lloyd**, UW-Milwaukee
- **Ramona Peetz**, UW-Milwaukee

ENCORE STUDIO received a \$50,000 capital grant from the PRL Keystone Foundation for their expansion! They will now be leasing the entire building they are presently using as they wrap 25th year of operation and look forward.

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GSAFE would like to thank the 500+ participants and more than 50 volunteers who made the 2024 Trick or Trot 5k Walk/Run a success. Honeycomb Salon Collective on Park Street, an inclusive and LGBTQ+ friendly establishment in Madison, is celebrating 10 years of operation this December. They invite those looking for an inclusive place for salon services to book with one of their team and enjoy a visit with the studio dogs Fabio & Fritz.

MADISON MINOTAURS RUGBY won the Madtown Scrumdown tournament. They would like to thank the teams who came and the sponsors who made hosting the event possible.

STAGEQ would like to thank this season's sponsors: PFund Foundation, Smart Dental, I/O Arcade Bar, Shannon Anderson with Ameriprise Financial, Ian's Pizza, and Soulful Saunas.

WI LGBT CHAMBER is thrilled to announce the recipients of the 2024 Business Awards, recognizing outstanding businesses, leaders, and advocates who have gone above and beyond in advancing diversity, inclusion, and equality in our business community. The recipients are:

- **Corporate Partner:** WPS, a health solutions company
- **LGBTQ Business:** Pawstar, Inc.
- **Allied Business:** Confluence Graphics
- **Nonprofit:** Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design (MIAD)
- **Business Resource Group:** Pride@Enerpac
- **John Ross Pruess Business Leader:** CoryHighshaw
- **Advocates:** Rae and Gina Senarighi

STAFF / BOARD CHANGES

Who's moving on or moving into org leadership.

GENDER & SEXUALITY CAMPUS CENTER has named **Caitlyn LoMonte** as interim director after the departure of **Warren Scherer**. Caitlyn earned her Bachelor of Arts in Women's Studies and Bachelor of Science in Advertising from the University of Florida where she was a Machen Florida Opportunity Scholar. She served as an AmeriCorps VISTA at the University of Florida providing resources, support, and outreach to first-generation college students and high-risk high school students before moving to Chicago to pursue a Master of Arts in Women's and Gender Studies from DePaul University. Caitlyn is passionate about social change, education, empowerment, and building a more inclusive campus together.

THE HOUSE INC. would like to welcome two new instructors. **Rachelle Fochs** will be instructing dancers in ballet and **Paul Fass** will act as an intermediate tumbling coach.

OUTREACH LGBTQ+ CENTER joined together in September to mourn the passing of Elder Advocate **Kristi Mason**, beloved coworker, chosen family member, and dear friend. In November they will seek applicants to continue Kristi's vital work as well as hiring a new Grants Manager.

WI LGBT CHAMBER welcomes **Kim Valenta** as their New Outreach Coordinator serving South Central Wisconsin. Valenta will serve as the Chamber's brand ambassador in Madison and the surrounding areas, including Beloit, Janesville, and other parts of the region. A graduate of UW-Stevens Point, Valenta holds degrees in Sociology, Social Work, and English, and has dedicated their career to empowering diverse populations. She brings extensive experience in outreach, volunteer management, and client services, with a background in supporting survivors of domestic abuse, sexual assault, and human trafficking. ■

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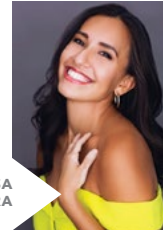
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YOUTH QTBIPOC LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Empowering & Trusting Youth

Director of Youth Programming at GSAFE **Yanté Turner** created an LTI workshop for white queer and trans youth to talk about white supremacy and Black and brown liberation, leading this Black, trans abolitionist organizer to full-time work with the organization.

THE NEW DIRECTOR of Youth Programming at GSAFE, Yante Turner, sees the young people he works with as the true leaders. “I believe that young people are already experts,” he says.

At his core, Turner says he is a Black, trans abolitionist organizer. As a change agent, he seeks to make queer and trans youth feel seen and show them that LGBTQIA+ adults are thriving. “It’s being that person to hold space for young people,” Turner says of his role. “The other part is the development of their leadership, which I think is really significant in our work, because it gives and shifts power to young people.”

GSAFE’s mission is to act as a catalyst for LGBTQIA+ youth development, leadership, and support in K–12 schools, but Turner thinks GSAFE does far more work than the mission statement can capture.

Turner was born on Milwaukee’s northside, and he comes from “Black mamas that know too much and from elders and ancestors that will give up the world for my liberation and freedom.” Outside his director role, Turner does community work that brings him a “lot of

life” and “fortifies” his role at GSAFE. “I love Black people. I love trans folks,” Turner says. “I’ve been in community with Black queer and trans abolitionists and abolitionist work for the past several years.”

CREATING IMPACT FROM THE START

Turner may be in a new position, but he is not new to GSAFE. He started working at GSAFE as an AmeriCorps member, working with both GSAFE and Diverse & Resilient in Milwaukee to collaborate and create a bridge between the two organizations and communities. For several years, Turner worked as a counselor for the GSAFE’s Leadership Training Institute (LTI). As a counselor, he says he was able to be in community with queer and trans youth experiencing realities both similar and drastically different to his own.

While at the Leadership Training Institute, Turner created a training for white queer and trans youth, many of whom had never been around Black and brown people, to talk about white supremacy and what it means “to create concrete change and shift narratives as white allies to Black and brown liberation of trans people.” The training Turner created allowed him to build a relationship with GSAFE that was also connected to the spirit and community-based work he did as an abolitionist organizer. “It opened up my heart to GSAFE,” he says.

Turner also works with Sun-Seeker MKE, a Black and trans abolitionist collective, where he introduced the training he developed at GSAFE. Workshops offered a place for Black and brown people to “speak and talk without punishment, carcerality, or criticism” and ended with young white people working in groups to process the steps of anti-racism.

In the workshops, Turner saw young white queer and trans people who had never thought about their relationship to their whiteness chal-

lenge themselves and challenge the people around them.

“It allowed me to see that young people are always going to be okay,” he says. “Adults are the issue, because we’re not being critical about what’s being offered. We’re not being critical about our relationship with each other. Young people were doing it in that session.”

Turner’s experience as an LTI counselor, and his experience developing new training for young people, led him to where he is now. “That’s how I got into it,” he says. “Watching young people be brilliant and then challenging myself to be in a full-time role to continue to challenge white supremacy.”

SETTING GOALS, PASSING THE TORCH

One thread running through Turner’s work is his trust in young people to build a better future. “We are the holders of things, not the leaders,” he says. “When we talk about developing young people to sit in the spots that we are currently in, that looks like mentorship, that looks like advocacy and support, and that looks like adults moving over and literally putting funds, support, and resources where their mouth is.”

At GSAFE, there is a focus on “wraparound care” and “dignity-based work” to treat young people as “whole people.” When mentoring a young person in a leadership role, or encouraging them to attend a program, Turner says, “You actually have to care about their mental health. You have to care about what their communities look like, what their parents are saying, if they’re getting enough sleep, if they have access to food.”

Turner believes GSAFE’s job is to explore what it looks like to set young people up to thrive, even if they currently aren’t. “We’re trying to remove ourselves from the survival lens of queerness,” he says.

In his new role, Turner has several goals, the first being to serve more people of color. GSAFE has historically served white people and been led by white people, he says. Turner credits Executive Director Tyrone Creech for transforming and shifting GSAFE’s mission and vision. “TJ is now in leadership as a Black, gay man who was born and raised in Madison and understands the political and social landscape he is in,” Turner says. “I’m here because I want to follow him.”

“When we talk about developing young people to sit in the spots that we are currently in, that looks like mentorship, that looks like advocacy and support, and that looks like adults moving over and literally putting funds, support, and resources where their mouth is.”

Turner wants Black young people to have access to the resources that GSAFE has, and he wants to create leadership positions for young people within GSAFE. He also wants to make sure transfemme folks are served by GSAFE in ways that are “autonomous and valued by them.”

Turner’s largest goal while at GSAFE is to establish a “peer-to-peer, youth-based crisis intervention response.” The community response would be a community-to-community training program that trains young people in mental health first aid de-escalation, covering everything from how to make a gunshot wound non-lethal to drug overdose reversal.

“Young people are not all right, and simultaneously are all right,” Turner says. “That is because we allow young people to ferment in the terrors of the world and offer no solutions as the people that have given them that world.” He says many adults fear that because they have to make room for young people, they have to move “out of existence.” Turner says that is not the goal. “Move out of power, so our young people can move into positions of power, and we can move into positions of mentorship and care.” ■



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HEALTH CARE | HOLISTIC CARE | MENTAL HEALTH

A Journey of Wellness, Identity, and Community

Mandie Eagan is the founder of **Viva Infusions & Wellness** in Mt. Horeb.

The clinic reflects her belief that health care should be personal, inclusive, and empowering.



know, I was about to meet the love of my life. She was sitting in the back seat of the car, and 18 months later, she followed me to my first duty station in San Antonio, Texas. There, we made history as the first same-sex couple to pin my rank of Captain in my squadron in the Air Force.

BECOMING A PARENT

After my tour in Afghanistan, we decided to grow our family. We used the cup and syringe method to conceive, and when our daughter was born, we became the first couple at San Antonio Military Medical Center to have a birth certificate that read “Parent 1” and “Parent 2” instead of “Mother” and “Father.” This was a moment of immense pride, not just for us, but for the community we were helping pave the way for.

CAREER ADVANCEMENT

But life didn’t slow down. Pursuing my doctorate while raising an 18-month-old was one of the most challenging times of my life. I was absent far too often, focused on school and work, while my wife and her family took on the bulk of parenting. It caused strain, frustration, and led to feelings of guilt. After finishing my degree and stepping into the real world, things didn’t improve. I was working 70-hour weeks in the operating room, on call every four days, and when I finally came home, I was utterly exhausted. I knew something had to change.

STARTING A BUSINESS

In May 2022, I took the leap to leave full-time anesthesia and open Viva Infusions & Wellness. It was risky. I had no idea how the community would respond to alternative treatments like IV vitamins, minerals, supplements, and hormone replacement therapy. Offering ketamine for chronic pain and mental health was the riskiest of all. But I knew firsthand the power of these treatments. My mother’s battle with complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS) and two of my sisters’ significant mental health issues—which prevent them from leading full lives or working—fueled my passion to make these therapies accessible in a supportive and affirming environment.

STORIES OF EMPOWERMENT & IMPROVEMENT

At Viva, we’ve created a space where everyone is welcome, where people can take control of their health and feel empowered in their own wellness journey. One of the most rewarding experiences we’ve had was with a lesbian couple. One partner came in seeking relief from

chronic pain, while the other struggled with debilitating orthostatic hypotension. After just one NAD+ infusion, the latter experienced a dramatic improvement. She no longer needed to stop halfway up the stairs because of dizziness. That moment—watching her wife’s joy—was a testament to the power of personalized care and the impact it can have on the LGBTQ+ community.

Another memorable story involves a phone call I received late at night from a father in distress, just after Christmas. He had personally experienced ketamine treatments the year before, which had helped reduce the severity of his depression. Now, his 17-year-old son, a young gay man, had spiraled into a debilitating depression following a traumatic event at school. His son had stopped thriving—he wasn’t eating, wasn’t engaging in life, and traditional treatments like antidepressants—which could take up to six weeks to start working—were not an option for him. The family had spent countless hours with psychologists and psychiatrists, but the wait for real relief was too long.

Understanding the urgency, we began ketamine infusion treatments right away—six sessions over the course of two weeks. I remember meeting the young man for the first time; he reminded me of that scene in the Trolls movie, where the trolls turn gray from sadness when they’re about to be eaten by the Bergens. He was lifeless, making little eye contact, and was visibly thin. But after the second infusion, I noticed a subtle change—his eyes held more color, and he looked at me a little longer. By the third infusion, he walked into the clinic and hugged me, telling me that the ketamine had helped him realize how meaningful his life was, and how small his problems seemed in the grand scheme of things. By the end of the two weeks, he was full of color, had gained some weight, and was thriving once again. His parents were thrilled by his remarkable turnaround, lamenting why ketamine wasn’t a first-line treatment for depression and suicidal ideation.

The last time I saw him, he came in for a booster infusion three months later, excitedly telling me he was off to Arizona State on a full-ride scholarship. He left me a thank you card and a gift, and in that moment, I felt the full impact of the work that I do. No thank you note or five-star review (of which we’ve received nearly 70) compares to the reward of knowing you’ve truly helped someone turn their life around.

SERVICES TO THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY & BEYOND

I’ve always believed that health care should be affirming, sensitive, and supportive. As someone who is part of the LGBTQ+ community, I understand the importance of feeling seen and understood by your healthcare provider. Unfortunately, traditional health care, often limited by insurance, doesn’t always provide the holistic and preventive care that people need. That’s why Viva operates as a cash-pay practice, which allows us to delve deeper into issues like hormone balance, weight loss, and fatigue. We’ve seen firsthand how transformative this approach can be.

Starting a business while raising a child and trying to balance family life hasn’t been easy. There have been sleepless nights, moments of doubt, and countless hours spent worrying about whether I made the right decision. But every time I see a patient walk out of our clinic feeling better—feeling hopeful—I’m reminded of why I started this journey in the first place.

For me, Viva Infusions & Wellness is more than a business. It’s a reflection of my belief that health care should be personal, inclusive, and empowering. We offer a space where people can heal, thrive, and take control of their health. And I’m proud to offer that space to my fellow LGBTQ+ community members and beyond.

For more information, go to vivainfusions.com or call/text 608-820-8482 to schedule a consultation. ■

FOR MORE THAN 25 YEARS, my life’s work has revolved around caring for others. From critical care nursing to anesthesia, I’ve always been driven by the desire to make a meaningful difference in people’s lives. But it wasn’t until May 2022, when I founded Viva Infusions & Wellness, that I truly found my calling in holistic care. The journey to this point, however, was anything but linear—it was shaped by personal growth, my identity as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, and my experiences as a nurse and mother.

COMING OUT

Growing up as a sheltered Jehovah’s Witness, I didn’t even know what a lesbian was. Homosexuality, I was taught, was wrong. Yet, when I began to realize that I had feelings for girls, I knew I had to be honest with myself. In 1996, I came out to everyone I knew. It wasn’t easy. I lost a friend who thought it was just a phase, but I also gained clarity. My uncle came out shortly after I did, and now, two of my sisters are also lesbians. My family’s journey reflects the power of authenticity and the importance of embracing who you are.

TRAVEL NURSE

As I stepped into my career, my path as a nurse took me all over the country. I went from my home state of Florida to Austin, Texas, and eventually to Long Beach, California, working as a traveling ICU nurse. These years were formative, not just professionally but personally. One of the pivotal moments came when a friend invited me to a drag show in Dubuque, Iowa. I wasn’t expecting much, but little did I



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QTBIPOC DRAG MILWAUKEE TRANS PERSEVERANCE

Midwest Princess

Jeilanna Josii overcame isms and poverty to become a well-known drag queen performing to crowds of tens of thousands. [Here's her story.](#)

JEILANNA JOSII of Milwaukee is a showgirl, princess, and rising queen amongst trans women and drag queens, and like many who have come before her, she has had to fight through transphobia, homophobia, an unsettled family life, and poverty to reach where she is today. Jeilanna was born in Milwaukee but raised in Manteca, California, a small town less than 100 miles from queer haven San Francisco.

FACING RACISM, HOMOPHOBIA, AND TRANSPHOBIA AS A YOUTH

Despite the proximity to San Francisco, she faced extreme racism in her community and extreme homophobia and transphobia from her religious family. She's grateful for her time in California, however, because, despite encountering more racism than in segregated Milwaukee, people there were more accepting of her sexual and gender identities, and she was able to play around with different characters while trying to settle into who she was as a Black, trans girl. She could be open in school and work, effectively becoming two different people: The silly feminine princess to her friends, and the person who was assigned male at birth and who pretended to be who her grandparents and family wanted her to be.

BEING REJECTED BY FAMILY

Unfortunately, Jeilanna slipped up on Instagram while her family was away on vacation, showing herself playing with her friend's makeup and wigs. Her cousin saw the post and outed her to her family, with her mom even calling her at work. When she admitted to being queer and wanting to be a girl, her mother had such a negative reaction that Jeilanna was afraid to be honest with her grandparents, with whom she lived. She trusted another family member with the truth, and was subsequently outed to her grandmother, too, at the age of 16. Her family life disintegrated from there. From ages 16 to 18, Jeilanna emotionally detached from her

California family, and worked all the time, not wanting to come home and not feeling like she was wanted there. She ran away a few times.

FINDING HER PLACE IN COMMUNITY AND ON STAGE

Once she graduated high school and was 18, she left California and returned to her birthplace, Milwaukee, to live with another grandmother. Once back in Wisconsin, she attended Milwaukee PrideFest and saw her future in the women and drag queens performing on stage. She talked to them and did more research, attending shows at the now-closed Hamburger Mary's and making friends with the queens there. She knew what she wanted to do and started practicing any time she could, buying and learning about makeup, making videos to post on social media, and getting a job at Hamburger Mary's—where she had to walk an hour to and from work because she didn't have a car. She played around with different personas onstage and off, playing with gender roles and who she wanted to be. She has settled now on a princess persona, one she says is a combination of her "old school era" and "glamor era," and has been able to build on that to become something that she is proud of. Despite the rejections and strain, she still has a connection to her family, and especially her mother, using her as an inspiration for her drag personas, and wants to leave the door open for future reconciliation.

MAKING A LIVING THROUGH ENTERTAINMENT

Now, through dogged determination, good looks, media savvy, and a sparkling personality, Jeilanna has achieved more than she dreamed possible, working with Red Bull to represent the LGBTQ+ community in front of 60,000 people, and with Chappell Roan, helping the rising super star and being a part of her platform in the mainstream. Jeilanna now makes a living through her entertainment, and, in a country where racism and transphobia are still as rampant as ever, she makes herself visible and succeeds in communities where she and others like her have

not traditionally been accepted. She got there through significant sacrifice, and "overcoming excuses that I was using to hold me back," she said. She doesn't have a car, so when she started booking gigs further afield than her home base of Milwaukee, she took the Greyhound bus there, doing her makeup in the two-person seats on her way.

REFLECTING ON HER PATH TO HAPPINESS

Jeilanna is nothing if not an optimist, and her belief that she has something to offer people, and something to say, has driven her through even the darkest times. When asked what she would tell that scared 16-year-old in California who had just been outed and was terrified of what was coming, she said she would tell herself to be patient, take your time, and to live your own truth over making other people happy. "Choose joy," she would say. "Know that it is possible to be happy, which is not an easy task, by constantly working toward it, moving closer and closer to the light." And these are not the words of a naive girl; Jeilanna fully knows just how hard this path is. That's why she wants to be a teacher eventually, to teach kids who, like her, have had to fight through poverty, racism, and homophobia. She wants to tell them to never give up or let others extinguish their light.

ACCEPTING EVERY PART OF HERSELF

Growing up, Jeilanna always aspired toward greatness and ending the suffering of others—even while her family talked about her and others like her as if they were objects, separate from themselves. She knew this wasn't true, but the deeply sensitive person she is was wounded by the hatefulness she witnessed, and says that it "almost prevented me from making my own future." She compares herself to a Kintsugi vase, one which has been broken, but then glued back together in gold to create a whole new form. "I've always felt broken," she said, "but I've learned to love and accept those parts of myself, too." ■



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BOOKS POPULAR CULTURE VISUAL ART SUPERHEROES COLLEGE

American Studies, Queered

UW Professor **Ramzi Fawaz** explores the relationship between popular culture and radical social movements in the modern United States, specifically how books, film, and visual media give voice to the marginalized.

AT THE INTERSECTION of American popular culture, literature, and history you may find public intellectual Ramzi Fawaz. He stands at the roundabout helping travelers navigate the chaos and noise churning around them. As a full Professor of English at UW-Madison, Fawaz’s job is to broaden his students’ understanding of how any variety of contemporary media engages difference and creates new possibilities of social transformation. Spend a moment with his work, and you will never look at the comic book you just read, or your favorite video game, or any of your mass media guilty pleasures, in the same way.

Fawaz, who has lived in Madison for 12 years, began his academic trajectory at the University of California, Berkeley as an undergraduate in literature. As he recalls it, he was a sophomore when he “accidentally discovered” the field of American Cultural Studies in the form of Professor Kathleen Moran’s course on the 1980s. It “boggled his mind.” Every week they watched a movie in class and deconstructed it through a postmodernist lens. Familiar films such as *9 to 5*, *Heathers*, and *Back to the Future* had new meaning. He came out to his family because of



Thelma & Louise (long story for another time, but you can read the first 10 pages of *Queer Forms* if you are curious).

COMIC BOOKS SAVED HIS LIFE

Prior to Professor Moran’s class, Fawaz had not realized that one could study cinema, visual culture, and literature in tandem with subjects such as politics, everyday life, and sociology. Professor Moran noticed Fawaz’s gift for thinking about media in this interdisciplinary way, and she encouraged him to double major in English and American Studies.

The following year, he became a teaching assistant to Professor Moran for a class she taught on consumer society. This meant that he began earning money for professorial duties as an undergraduate. He had never dreamed that he could make a living from something he loved so much. Professor Moran even invited him to lecture to the class about comics and consumerism. Comic books had “saved his life” as a teenager and now he was gaining a new and much deeper appreciation for their profound cultural significance. He focused his first lecture on an X-Men comic called “The Dark Phoenix Saga,” an epic tragedy about a superhero who becomes a god, consumes an entire star in another universe, and then kills a

billion people on another planet. The saga came out during the energy crisis of the 1970s, so Fawaz analyzed the story through that context. At the end of the lecture, he says, Professor Moran looked at him and said, “This is what you should be doing for a living.” He felt it, too.

MAKING A LIVING DOING WHAT HE LOVES

After his junior year, he was “off to the races.” He won a SURF, the Yale Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship program for under-represented students who aspire to attain doctoral degrees. He

was paid to live on Yale’s campus in New Haven while researching and writing about superhero teens and queer families. He had full access to all the resources of Yale University, and was mentored by queer art historian, Jonathan D. Katz (who is now at Penn in the Art History Department).

It was through SURF that Fawaz started to ask himself the question that would propel his academic pursuits for many years: “How was it that as a 13-year-old, bullied, gay, Lebanese-American immigrant, who was constantly feeling the crushing weight of homophobia, reading comic books made him feel like he belonged in the world?” He theorized that superhero comic books, by reinterpreting the superhero from the white, masculine figure of national power dominant in the prewar period to the mutant outcast of the postwar period, reflected the ideals of multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, inclusion, and democratic life. Fawaz started to see how comic books celebrate found families and marginalized identities and use fantasy to imagine more equitable social and political possibilities.

SUPERHEROES AS CULTURAL TRANSFORMERS

Like a superhero on a mission, Fawaz blasted through graduate school in American Studies at George Washington University. His PhD dissertation became the basis for his first book, *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics* (NYU Press, 2016). That work challenged conventional readings of superhero comics by revealing their importance as cultural transformers who create alliances across differences. He developed the theory of “Queer Mutanity”:

I pointed out that the notion of a ‘universal humanity’ so central to liberal politics in the post-WWII period had failed to include vast swathes of the human population still seen as marginal or outcast to a predominantly white Western worldview. I suggested that comics like the X-Men and the Fantastic Four responded to this failure by presenting the idea of a “queer mutanity.” This concept suggested that we are all bound together not by our common humanity but by our distinctiveness, the countless ways we each seemingly fail to live up to an idealized version of humankind.

Fawaz prides himself on communicating in an accessible and grounded way, and indeed, *New Mutants* had a crossover audience of both ivory tower academics and general readers. In fact, one of the most significant contributions of that text has been its role in building bridges and sparking public conversations about queerness, social justice, and popular culture. It garnered, for Fawaz, the prestigious ASAP Book Prize from the Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present, the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies Fellowship Award, and honorable mention for the Laura Romero First Book Prize of the American Studies Association.

Though he initially made his name through analysis of postwar comics, Fawaz’s scholarship now follows the paths of his current pop culture interests. He returns to comics regularly, but he doesn’t dwell on them:

I don’t like the idea that people in the humanities get so boxed in to specific objects, to specific fields; they are supposed to be asking big questions. I often have to say ‘no’ to people who write me wanting to interview me about comic books. I’m like, ‘Girl, that was 12 years ago, like I have moved on.’ I love comics. They are great. I return to the realm of superheroes quite often—a chapter of my new book is about the Spider-Verse films as psychedelic cultural products—but let other people have their say. You’ve heard enough from me.

ASKING THE BIG QUESTIONS

Fawaz’s wide-ranging interests include television, children’s literature, and youth-oriented cultural products. “I have really big questions



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about the world,” he explains. “I’m interested in how people use the imagination to make social and political change creatively.” As a columnist for *Film Quarterly*, he writes about a new movie every three months. His next article for them will be about the 2024 film, *The Wild Robot*, based on the 2016 children’s book by Peter Brown.

In his second book, Fawaz turned to the queer and feminist 70s. *Queer Forms* (NYU Press, 2022) explores how pop culture products, from children’s picture books to performance art, have shaped queer social movements and political consciousness since the 1960s. The work exemplifies Fawaz’s commitment to examining how fantasy can be used as a vehicle

Fawaz started to see how comic books celebrate found families and marginalized identities and use fantasy to imagine more equitable social and political possibilities.

of political agency—and, ultimately, social evolution—when marginalized communities use popular culture to imagine and create change. “The through line of all the books is this question about how you cultivate the faculty of the imagination to do real material work in the world.”

Fawaz’s latest project is called *Literary Theory on Acid: Reading for Diversity in the Psychedelic Era*. The book examines the various ways that popular culture reflects the contemporary psychedelic renaissance, that is, the project of using and studying psychoactive medicines to treat a variety of forms of mental distress. Over the last 20 years, Fawaz argues, American popular culture has become extremely psychedelic both aesthetically and creatively. Such psychedelic forms of pop culture are visually arresting, expansive, and filled with special effects that invoke in their audiences “heightened states of emotional response, precisely to break them out of habituated patterns of psychological distress.”

Examples include films like *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, the Spider-Verse films, and the television series *Undone*, in which traveling across time and space heals the traumas of the main character’s Latine past. Fawaz shows how each of these cultural texts is playing on a distinct aspect of psychedelic experience but without the consumer having to actually take drugs to feel the liberatory benefits.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HUMANITIES

“Popular culture is ahead of the game,” he says. It acknowledges that we are going through a period of mental distress and tries to innovate to alter our senses. At the root, the deeper argument Fawaz is making in his current work is about the importance of the humanities. Where psychedelic therapy attempts to induce transformation through the use of mind-altering drugs, the humanities uses art and literature to achieve the same effect. “The humanities are one of the biggest defenses of young people’s mental well-being in our country. They go to humanities to study the multi-dimensional nature of human creativity and imagination,” he says.

The humanities also develop young people’s ability to form their own opinions and make political judgements about the world in a way that validates their worldview. He adds, “The humanities is where people go to feel more human. The denigration of the humanities ignores this crucial fact, and I find it really ironic that people are very easily convinced to do psychedelic therapy, but they are not easily convinced that the humanities matter.” In the book he is currently writing, Fawaz creates a conversation between psychedelic medicine and humanistic thought, and he shows how they can learn something from each other. Helping students process and understand the world around them



In his teaching at UW-Madison, Fawaz brings the same passionate engagement with popular culture and critical theory that characterizes his scholarship. Recently, after returning from sabbatical feeling reinvigorated, he designed courses about “Psychedelic Imaginaries” and “Arab-American Literature and Popular Culture.” Students are hungry for classes that help them process and understand the world around them and the times in which they live. Fawaz makes complex theoretical concepts accessible while challenging students to think more deeply about the media and ideologies they are consuming.

Central to Fawaz’s work is the belief that popular culture matters—not just as entertainment, but as the scene of collective struggle where people argue over what should be the shared values of our society. As our country engages in a mammoth game of political and cultural tug-of-war, and the role of popular media continues to be debated, Fawaz’s scholarship is increasingly relevant. His work provides essential tools for understanding how popular culture can either reinforce or challenge social norms around gender, sexuality, and identity.

As both a scholar and educator, Fawaz, who currently holds a Romnes faculty fellowship for advanced research in the humanities, continues to demonstrate the vital importance of studying popular culture through a feminist and queer lens. His work reminds us that the stories we are drawn to—whether in comic books, movies, or other media—have the power to shape how we understand ourselves, imagine possible futures, and change the world. ■



KARIN WOLF is an arts administrator, freelance arts writer, and consultant. She likes to get deep and try to understand complex art, people, and ideas. Writing about them is her favorite way to do so. She has a M.S. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and undergraduate degrees in History, History of Cultures, and Afro-American History.

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HEALTH & WELLNESS HEALTH CARE DEI



After graduating, Dennis worked at the Surgeon General's office in Washington D.C., which cemented his interest in public health. This inspired him to pursue a master's degree in social epidemiology, which evaluates the socioeconomic factors that influence disease prevalence within individuals, communities, and populations. He was able to put his knowledge into practice at a non-governmental organization that funded interventional health care for women and children worldwide.

"This was a life-changing experience," said Dennis. "I was able to see what health care meant for developing communities in Asia, Africa, and South America. It was a very interesting chance to study how and why disease impacts different populations. What are they doing differently? Is it their habits? Is it their diet? Is it the quality of the food, air, and water in their area?"

"In the United States, we think of health care as going to the doctor or hospital," said Dennis. "But the truth of the matter is that most of our health and wellness is determined by our interactions with our environment. Where we grow up, and what is available to us, has a tremendous impact on our entire lifespan. This experience taught me that socioeconomic status, education status, and our cultural differences should always be considered in the design and delivery of care."

CAREER PATH

Traveling the world was a wonderful experience, but it was also challenging for a young adult just starting his career. Dennis returned to the United States and took a teaching job.

"While teaching, I saw the connection between what people heard, what people retained, and what people acted on," said Dennis. "For example, we've known for over 50 years that smoking is bad for you, and while smoking rates have declined dramatically, some people continue to smoke. Why is it that health care access and knowledge did not influence behavior changes for those people?"

Dennis pursued a master's degree in teaching and learning theory to help him answer that question. After completing his program, he joined the University of Utah Hospital in his first health care strategy role.

"I'm often asked what a health care strategist does," said Dennis, "and here is how I explain it. Think of us as the futurists. The strategist plans what the future looks like for the healthcare system. We focus on the population that the health system serves and assess the unique health and medical needs of that community. We create long-term plans to bridge the gaps between what is and what should be."

After nine years with the University of Utah, Dennis joined Gillette Children's Hospital in the Twin Cities in 2014. As the chief strategy officer, he was responsible for clinical program design, innovation process, partnership development, and market analysis functions.

And then he got a call from UW Health.

"I was absolutely interested," said Dennis. "The UW Health system

has an amazing national reputation, and I had known providers who attended medical school, training, or conferences here. I really wanted to get back into academic medicine, so I raised my hand when I heard about the job. I got lucky, and here I am! We moved here in May, 2022."

LEADING CHANGE IN WISCONSIN

Dennis joined UW Health as the system vice president of strategy and planning. He was given a blank canvas to rebuild the strategy development process from scratch. He developed a strategic playbook for the future of the organization, and now he is leading the implementation of a system-wide portfolio.

And he is anchoring the future in health care access and equity.

"When I worked overseas, I was hyper aware of how access to health care transformed lives," said Dennis. "And yet, we see those same inequities here in the United States, and here in Wisconsin. This is a universal problem. When people do not have equal access to the things that make us healthy, whether it be good food or clean water or quality care, there is inequity and injustice. There are real issues with how we fund health care in the United States. Care deserts, service reductions, healthcare costs, and insurance disparities compound the problem."

"The cost of health care is a real problem in the United States," said Dennis, "and that just adds to the inequity. One of our strategic priorities is around value creation: How can we deliver care at a lower cost more efficiently?"

"I'd like to see any person who needs care to be able to get it quickly, easily, and at a price that is affordable to them," said Dennis. "We want people to be able to get that immunization, fix that painful tooth, get the ultrasound, go to therapy, just find out what is going on. These moments have a huge impact on overall health and wellbeing, but they're out of reach for too many people."

"We cannot solve these problems overnight, but at UW Health, we are very cognizant of our responsibility to try to improve health care accessibility for everyone in the state. It is not going to be an easy fix, in fact, it is a big lift. But it is a problem we are really, truly, committed to solving. And I am proud of the organization for making healthcare equity and access to care our top priorities."

"Culturally competent care is critical for LGBTQ people," said Dennis, "because you need to be able to talk to your doctor about your health concerns, no matter who you are."

"One of the reasons I like academic medicine is the nonprofit mission of advancing health, science, and knowledge," said Dennis. "It is not about profit. It is about making the community stronger."

Dennis sees Wisconsin's geographic diversity as a strength and an opportunity. Health care access varies between urban and rural communities, and even more so since the pandemic.

"Rural hospitals are having a harder and harder time getting healthcare professionals to live and work there," said Dennis. "During the pandemic, services and hours were reduced at many facilities, and it is harder for people to find quality care close to home. That is a big, big problem. We are doing what we can to increase virtual care, telemedicine, and digital appointments, but we are also supporting local community hospitals at the same time."

TRANSFORMING LGBTQ HEALTH

Dennis is proud of UW Health's commitment to diversity, equity,

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and inclusion. He's served on the Board of Governors for the Human Rights Campaign for eight years.

"I've been able to get involved with a number of local organizations," said Dennis, "and on a personal level, I am supportive of Fair Wisconsin. Their support of equality-minded candidates across the state is so essential. They are doing some really great work, and hopefully we'll see it pay off here in the near future. I am inspired by the work of Access Community Health Centers (ACHC), who support underserved and uninsured patients here in Dane County. Some of these populations do not necessarily trust doctors who do not look like them, or speak their language, or understand their unique challenges. ACHC does a really, really great job of getting everyone the care they need."

"Culturally competent care is critical for LGBTQ people," said Dennis, "because you need to be able to talk to your doctor about your health concerns, no matter who you are. Everyone deserves healthcare providers who can and will hear you, understand you, and make you feel comfortable and confident. This experience is as important to us as it is to our patients. Coming out is never easy, and you should never have to worry about coming out to your provider."

"We are seeing a huge need for behavioral health support, especially



for LGBTQ youth," said Dennis. "But mental health support is also needed for older individuals, who may be aging alone without someone to help them with their health concerns."

"Transgender health is a top priority for us," said Dennis. "It is tragic how the trans community and their healthcare needs have been weaponized. UW Health has a very strong gender services program that provides outstanding support to trans folks at every step of their journey. However, we get a lot of negative attention for this service. Radio hosts have called us out on the radio, and our providers have been threatened. It is disappointing, it is heartbreaking, and it is wrong. And to think, all of this, simply for giving care to patients in need."

"That is another reason I am proud to work at UW Health. We are absolutely, unapologetically, committed to providing those healthcare services. We are standing up and saying these medical needs are just as legitimate as everyone else's. I am thankful there are providers who are willing to stand up and support this service."

The Wisconsin healthcare landscape has changed a lot in recent years, with many local systems merging with regional and national partners. Is hometown care still important?

"One hundred percent in my opinion," said Dennis. "That is not to say that a large system cannot support a small town community. But I do not think it is necessarily intuitive. Over the last decade, the motto has been 'bigger is better,' and mergers and acquisitions have been rampant. These decisions often lead to bigger, but not better. Systems become disconnected from their communities and make decisions that do not always put those communities' needs first."

"Although UW Health can feel very Madison-centric, our focus extends beyond Madison to independent regional hospitals throughout the state and in northern Illinois. We want to help them provide the best care possible to their patients, because they know their patients best."

WISCONSIN PROUD

Dennis and his husband Brent have been together for 18 years. The couple will celebrate their 10th wedding anniversary in December.

"I'm surprised he's put up with me that long," laughed Dennis.

Since moving to the Midwest, they have taken a deep dive into local experiences, including restaurants, dive bars, art fairs, day trips to Milwaukee, and concerts on the Capitol Square. Their next destinations will be Green Bay and Door County.

"The first time we went to the Square, we were meeting a friend of a friend. He said, 'find the gays under the oak tree,'" said Dennis. "Sounds easy, right? The Capitol Square is only so big. But there's more than one oak tree, and more than one group of gay people!"

"Any complaints I have about Madison are very much first-world problems. It's a great town. Wisconsin winters are tough for a Californian, but spring, summer, and fall more than make up for it."

What has been his biggest surprise about Wisconsin?

"You should not print this, but I think the Wisconsin Old Fashioned is kind of an abomination," joked Dennis. "I am more of a purist when it comes to what an Old Fashioned should be. I mean, mashing up all the stuff in the glass, and adding soda to it? What are you doing?" ■



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Madison Area Faith Directory

FAITH | OUT CLERGY | OPEN & AFFIRMING CONGREGATIONS



WE'VE COMPILED a list of churches, congregations, and spiritual communities that have visibly identified themselves as open and affirming to LGBTQ people. An open and affirming congregation is accepting of you as you are, and it validates you, your life, and your relationships.

This is an updated version of a list that was compiled in the very first year of *Our Lives*. It is drawn from several sources, including the research of the “Coming Out, Coming Together” coalition.

If you do not see a particular congregation on the list, this doesn't necessarily mean that it is not welcoming. Some groups are welcoming and affirming in essence, but have never debated the issue or created a public, wide-reaching statement about LGBTQ people in their community. If your church or community is not on this list, be sure to ask what the congregation's position is. Some may be tolerant, but ask that you remain quiet about your personal life—a “don't ask, don't tell” proposition. And some conservative denominations have appeared to be welcoming to all, but attempt to convince LGBTQ people to be celibate or to “convert” to heterosexuality.

We hope that this list will encourage you to revisit your spiritual past or embark on an exciting journey of discovering what faith and spirituality mean to you today.

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ADVENT LUTHERAN CHURCH & COMMUNITY OF HOPE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

7118 Old Sauk Rd., Madison | 608-836-1455 | madisonchristiancommunity.org

Advent Lutheran and Community of Hope UCC share worship space at the Madison Christian Community. Both are open and affirming congregations. They host a monthly Transgender Community Meal for trans and nonbinary people in the Dane County area, which is also supported by Good Shepherd Lutheran Church.

BARABOO FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

131 Sixth Ave., Baraboo | 608-356-4300 | uccbboo.org

Founded in 1847, First Congregational UCC has a long history of social justice witness, including supporting the suffrage and abolitionist movements. The membership includes several gay and lesbian members and adopted its open and affirming statement in 2001. The lead pastor, Rev. Douglas Fauth, was the first openly gay ordinand in the Penn Central Conference of the UCC.

BETH ISRAEL CENTER

1406 Mound St., Madison | 608-256-7763 | bethisraelcenter.org

An egalitarian community of Conservative Judaism, Beth Israel Center has hosted an annual Pride Shabbat each summer since 2018. Rabbi Betsy Forester is committed to helping LGBTQIA+ people feel at home and “enhance their Jewish lives in relation to their LGBTQ+ journeys.” BIC is one of the sponsors of the annual Interfaith Transgender Day of Remembrance. The synagogue is also active in other areas of social justice work, including immigrant justice and racial justice.

BETHANY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

3910 Mineral Point Rd., Madison | 608-238-6381 | bethanymadison.org

Lead Pastor Rev. Julie Wilson led her previous church in becoming an LGBTQIA+-affirming congregation and is committed to making Betha-

ny a place where all are welcome. The church is part of the Reconciling Ministries Network of UMC (rmnetwork.org), which is committed to intersectional justice and the full participation of all LGBTQIA+ people in the life and leadership of the church.

CIRCLE SANCTUARY

5354 Meadowvale Rd., Barneveld | 608-924-2216 | circlesanctuary.org

A Nature Spirituality church founded by Rev. Selena Fox in 1974, Circle Sanctuary operates from a privately owned 200-acre nature preserve in the Driftless region, about 13 miles west of Mount Horeb. Here the Sanctuary hosts Full Moon circles, seasonal sabbats, volunteer days, and Sacred Fire Circles. Circle Sanctuary is one of the sponsors of the Interfaith Transgender Day of Remembrance. The nature preserve is not open to drop-in visits, but visitors are welcome at a variety of festivals and educational events, including the annual Earth Day Celebration. Circle Sanctuary also maintains an active online community and mailing list for its members.

COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF MADISON

326 S. Segoe Rd., Madison | 608-233-6297 | covenantmadison.org

In 2018 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) voted to affirm its commitment to full welcome, acceptance, and inclusion for LGBTQIA+ people. The inclusiveness of individual congregations varies, however, and the Covenant Network is working on expanding the church's commitment to inclusion, equity, and social justice. Covenant Presbyterian Church of Madison is currently the only congregation in Dane County that is part of the Covenant Network, though the denomination's Pres House Campus Ministry (see below) is also explicitly LGBTQIA+ affirming.

THE CROSSING CAMPUS MINISTRY

1127 University Ave., Madison | 608-257-1039 | thecrossinguw.org

The Crossing is an inclusive, multi-faith, non-profit organization at UW-Madison. They host a variety of events on campus, including a pay-what-you-can family dinner every Monday night and weekly gatherings on Wednesday night at the Wesley Chapel. They list “Trans is Beautiful” as one of their core affirmations on the organization's website, and back this up as sponsors of the Interfaith Transgender Day of Remembrance. The ministry is affiliated with and funded by the United Methodist Church, the American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin, and the United Church of Christ.

HOLY WISDOM MONASTERY

4200 County Highway M, Middleton | 608-836-1631 | holywisdommonastery.org

Originally founded as the St. Benedict Center by the Roman Catholic Church, Holy Wisdom Monastery is now an “ecumenical” organization, which means they are open to all. Its Sunday Assembly is an inclusive and welcoming worship community of about 200 people from diverse Christian backgrounds, focused on community building, social justice practices, and care for the earth. Its Center for Clergy Renewal provides “residential immersion” programs for early and mid-career pastors to connect with one another across differences of age, gender identity, ethnicity, denomination, and spiritual practice.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

518 North Franklin Ave., Madison | 608-233-1800 | firstbaptistmadison.org

First Baptist is a progressive Baptist congregation, part of the American Baptist Churches USA and the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists. In 1994 it became one of the first Baptist churches in the United States to openly declare itself welcoming to people of all sexual orienta-

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Local Out Clergy



- 1 **Pastor Scott Anderson**, Westminster Presbyterian Church
- 2 **Rev. Peter Beeson**, St John's Lutheran
- 3 **Rev. Douglas Fauth**, First Congregational United Church of Christ, Baraboo
- 4 **Rev. Selena Fox**, Circle Sanctuary
- 5 **Rev. Eldonna Hazen**, First Congregational United Church of Christ, Madison
- 6 **Rev. Rachel Kirk**, Middleton Community Church
- 7 **Cantor Jacob Niemi**, Temple Beth El
- 8 **Rev. Tim Schaefer**, First Baptist Church of Madison
- 9 **Rabbi Laurie Zimmerman**, Shaarei Shamayim

tions and gender identities. Their pastor since 2020, Rev. Tim Schaefer, is an out gay man with training in Gender and Sexual Justice from Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University. They have been described as one of Madison's most inclusive congregations.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

1609 University Ave., Madison | 608-233-9751 | firstcongrmadison.org

First Congregational has a long history of being an open and affirming congregation. It adopted its affirmation statement in 1992. Its senior minister, Rev. Eldonna Hazen, is an out lesbian who was profiled in the May 2008 issue of *Our Lives*.

FIRST UNITARIAN SOCIETY

900 University Bay Dr., Madison | 608-233-9774 | fusmadison.org

First Unitarian Society is a progressive religious community that encourages individual spiritual growth and community action in an atmosphere of warmth, freedom of belief, intellectual curiosity, and open dialogue. They are an independent organization but are affiliated with the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). The Society meets in the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Unitarian Meeting House in Shorewood Hills, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. The community has a strong commitment to social justice and donates half of its offerings to progressive nonprofits in Dane County.

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

203 Wisconsin Ave., Madison | 608-256-9061 | fumc.org

First United Methodist Church is an open and affirming congregation in downtown Madison. It is part of the Reconciling Ministries Network of UMC. The church is a sponsor of the OutReach Magic Festival at Warner Park.

GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH

5701 Raymond Rd. & 7291 County Highway PD | 608-271-6633 | gslcwi.com

Good Shepherd is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the largest and most progressive of the denominations in the U.S. (Note: Despite the name, the ELCA is not an "Evangelical" denom-

ination in the cultural sense of the word.) GSLC became a Reconciling in Christ (RIC) congregation by a membership vote in 2019, affirming its commitment to full inclusion for LGBTQIA+ persons. It is one of the sponsors of the Transgender Community Meal that meets at Advent Lutheran and Community of Hope.

ID-MADISON

608-836-8886 | idmadison.org

ID-Madison is an ecumenical Christian faith community affiliated with DIGNITY, a nationwide organization of LGBTQIA+ Roman Catholics and their friends, and with INTEGRITY, a similar organization for LGBTQIA+ members of the Episcopal church. The Wisconsin Conference of Churches has recognized ID-Madison as an AIDS Caring Community, meaning that it provides all of its services to HIV-infected persons without judgment, hesitation, or reservation. The group meets at St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church (6205 University Ave.) on most Saturdays from September to June for fellowship and worship.

JAMES REEB UU CONGREGATION

2146 East Johnson St., Madison | 608-242-8887 | jruuc.org

James Reeb Unitarian Universalist (UU) Congregation was spun off from the First Unitarian Society in 1993. JRUUC affirms and includes people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer at every level of congregational life—in worship, in program, and in social occasions—welcoming them as whole people. The congregation is culturally diverse and includes many members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

LAKE EDGE LUTHERAN CHURCH

4032 Monona Dr., Madison | 608-222-7339 | lelc.org

An ELCA church, Lake Edge is a member of the group Reconciling in Christ, which affirms people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. The congregation is active in the community on issues of social justice, environmental stewardship, and anti-racism education.

MADISON INSIGHT MEDITATION GROUP & MADISON VIPASSANA

madisonmeditation.org

Madison Insight Meditation Group and Madison Vipassana practice meditation in the tradition of Theravada Buddhism. Insight meditation (vipassana) is a practice of developing calm through sustained awareness of a meditation object (frequently the breath) and developing insight through mindful observation, investigation, and reflection. Madison Vipassana hosts retreats, while Madison Insight Meditation Group provides regular local meditation sessions and various practice opportunities, both in person and online. They welcome people of every race, culture, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, age, and religion, and are one of the sponsoring organizations for the Interfaith Transgender Day of Remembrance.

MADISON SUFIS

302 East Gorham St., Madison | madisonsufis.com

Spiritual director Shabda Kahn describes Sufism as "a mystic path based on the Awakened human heart recognizing its Unity with the Divine. The signs of this experience are the emergence of love, tolerance, compassion, and courage. Sufism is universal in nature and honors all the great messengers from the world's religions." LGBTQIA+ people who are part of the Sufi religion can take active roles, including spiritual leadership. Sufi ministers officiate at same-sex weddings and commitment ceremonies. The Madison Sufis host their "Dances of Universal Peace" twice a month at locations around Dane County.

MCFARLAND UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

5710 Anthony St., McFarland | 608-838-9322 | mcfarlanducc.org

McFarland UCC is, like many UCC member churches, an open and affirming congregation. Members of the congregation represented McFarland UCC during the ACT 5 AIDS Ride in 2007. The church's lead pastor, Bryan Sirchio (sirchio.com), is also a singer/songwriter who writes worship music for progressive Christian communities.

MEMORIAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

5705 Lacy Rd., Fitchburg | 608-273-1008 | memorialucc.org

Memorial UCC is an open and affirming congregation that welcomes people of all ages, races, sexual orientations, gender identities, and church backgrounds. The church hosts the Interfaith Transgender Day of Remembrance, an annual observance honoring the memories of those lost to acts of anti-transgender violence, in partnership with many other faith organizations in Dane County.

MIDDLETON COMMUNITY CHURCH UCC

645 Schewe Rd., Middleton | 608-831-4694 | middletonucc.org

"We recognize every person as a unique creation and beloved child of God," says MCC's website. "We celebrate this diversity and welcome women and members of the LGBTQ+ community to serve at every level of church leadership." Their lead pastor, Rev. Zayna Hart Thomley, helped found the Southwest Wisconsin Rainbow Alliance, which is committed to promoting equity, justice, and quality of life through support and advocacy for the LGBTQIA+ community. Associate pastor Rev. Rachel Kirk, who joined the staff in October 2024, is "a proud Millennial and LGBTQ+ leader." The church is one of the sponsors of the Interfaith Transgender Day of Remembrance.

ORCHARD RIDGE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

1501 Gilbert Rd., Madison | 608-271-7212 | orucc.org

Orchard Ridge's mission statement is "Spiritually Alive, Joyfully Inclusive, Committed to Justice." There are LGBTQIA+ people in every group, ministry, and leadership team at Orchard Ridge. The congregation voted to be open and affirming in 1993. The church is also active in addressing social justice issues, including mass incarceration, homelessness, and racial and immigration justice.

PLYMOUTH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

2401 Atwood Ave., Madison | 608-249-1537 | pcucc.org

Plymouth UCC has been one of the most visible open and affirming congregations in Madison since 1996. In June 2024, the church voted unanimously to declare itself an "Immigrant Welcoming Congregation," developing practices and programs to insure the respectful welcome and inclusion of immigrants and refugees. The church's website states its continued intention "to work toward helping those who feel marginalized or oppressed in our community."

PRES HOUSE CAMPUS MINISTRY

731 State St., Madison | 608-257-103 preshouse.org

A proudly LGBTQ+ affirming church for UW-Madison students, located on Library Mall. A ministry of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Pres House welcomes individuals of every perspective and background. The church is led by two BIPOC clergy, Rev. Erica Liu and Rev. Nii Addo Abrahams. According to their website, "We celebrate queer identities and experiences, draw on the richness of queer theology in our preaching, and welcome queer folks to lead in worship, serve on our Council, and otherwise shape our life together."



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PRAIRIE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SOCIETY

2010 Whenona Dr., Madison | 608-271-8218 | uuprairie.org

Formed when First Unitarian Society's growth showed a clear need for expansion in Madison, Prairie UU is led by its members, and it starts each service with a welcoming, affirming statement to its members. The church's Social Action Committee sponsors the Madison Pride Parade and is active in combating homelessness in Madison.

SHAAREI SHAMAYIN

900 University Bay Dr., Madison | 608-257-2944 | shamayim.org

Shaarei Shamayim is a Reconstructionist Jewish community, which believes that Judaism is "a means for bringing justice, holiness, and joy to the world." The congregation of over 200 households is LGBTQIA+ inclusive and welcomes Jews-by-choice and Jews of color. Rabbi Laurie Zimmerman is the spiritual leader here; she and her partner, Rabbi Renee Bauer, have two children.

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

322 East Washington Ave., Madison (Temporarily at 1127 University Ave.)
608-256-2337 | stjohmsmadison.org

St. John's voted to become a Reconciling in Christ (RIC) congregation in 2006. Its "More for Madison" campaign (moreformadison.org), begun in 2022, is tearing down its downtown building and replacing it with a 10-floor development that will include 130 affordable housing units, plus worship and community spaces. Lead pastor Rev. Peter Beeson is an out trans person and a member of Proclaim, a professional network of LGBTQIA+ Lutheran leaders. (Full disclosure: Vica-Etta Steel, a long-time contributor to *Our Lives*, is also a member of leadership.)

ST. MARK'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

605 Spruce St., Madison | 608-256-8463 | stmarksmadison.org

The mission statement of St. Mark's Lutheran Church is to "share the unconditional love of God. This includes those who have felt alienated because of sexual orientation, gender, age, physical or intellectual disability, financial resources, and family status." The church is a Reconciling in Christ (RIC) ELCA congregation, and incorporates both Spanish and American Sign Language into its worship services.

TEMPLE BETH EL

2702 Arbor Dr., Madison | 608-238-3123 | templebethelmadison.org

Temple Beth El is a member of the Union for Reform Judaism, which has, as a national organization, been open and affirming since 1987. They are part of Keshet (keshetonline.org), an organization that works for the full equality of all LGBTQIA+ Jews and their families in Jewish life. In 2021, TBE joined the Union for Reform Judaism's assessment process for Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, committing themselves to listen more intentionally to community voices and improve their inclusivity and accessibility. TBE is one of the organizers of the Interfaith Transgender Day of Remembrance service.

UNITY OF MADISON

601 Tompkins Dr., Monona | 608-221-1376 | unityofmadison.org

Unity Church is a spiritual organization founded by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore in 1889. Unity of Madison describes Unity as "a positive, practical, progressive approach to Christianity based on the teachings of Jesus and the power of prayer. Unity honors the universal truths in all religions and respects each individual's right to choose a spiritual path." They welcome everyone "regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, race, gender, economic status, and anything else under the sun." ■

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HISTORY MILWAUKEE GAY BARS ARCHIVES

From Passion Project to Preservation Powerhouse

Don Schwamb, founding father of the **Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project**, has retired after 30 years of leadership. We sat down with him to understand the history behind the Project, where it's been, and where it's going in the decades ahead.

ONCE A ONE-MAN EFFORT, the 30-year-old Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project is now an all-volunteer educational nonprofit led by a statewide board, community advisor network, and a corps of storytellers.

WHERE DOES YOUR STORY BEGIN?

I was born in July 1952 and grew up in West Bend. I was one of five children: One older sister and three younger sisters. I always told people, "My parents had all girls" as a joke. We lived about a mile outside the eastern city limits. We had an old barn, a small creek, and wildflower fields in our backyard. It was really nice. We had the conveniences of a suburb and the comforts of the countryside.

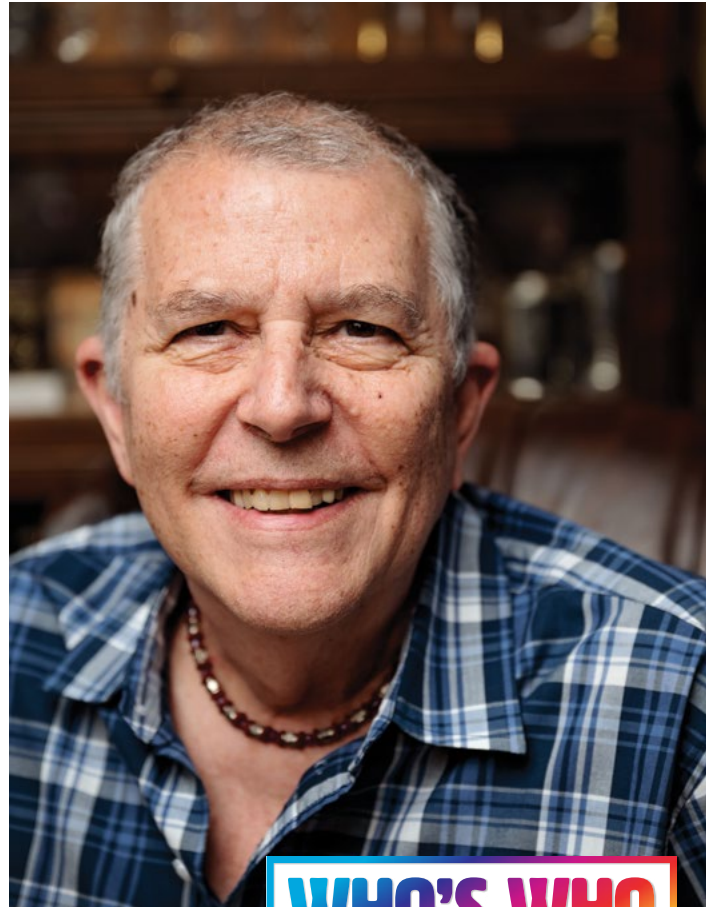
I got to know all the other kids in my area. We lived on a dead-end street, and we'd ride bikes all over the neighborhood. There wasn't really any traffic back then. West Bend wasn't quite suburban yet, but it was on its way. Back then, all the families were very traditional: A mother, a father, two or three kids. It was about as Middle America as it gets!

Growing up, I don't remember a single gay person on TV or in the movies. But I do remember a neighborhood boy my age who I just loved hanging around with. The more I think about it, I think that's when I knew I was different. I was maybe 11 or 12 when I told my parents that I liked boys, not girls. They wanted to take me to our family doctor, but I knew there was nothing wrong with me, and I told them that.

When I started questioning myself, there was really nothing, nothing at all, to help guide any answers. You had to be so discrete. I couldn't just walk up to librarians and ask them for recommendations. I had to flip through the card catalogs and hope nobody noticed what I was looking at. There was nothing useful in the high school library, and while the West Bend Public Library had resources, they were sparser than sparse. You were really on your own to figure it out.

Midnight Cowboy (1969) was a game-changer for me. I really loved that movie. This guy from the country hits New York City, meets all these different people, and some of them just happened to be gay. And I thought he was hot as heck! So that's how it was, you'd find these movies that spoke to you, but you couldn't always tell other people why.

They hoped I'd grow out of it, but when I was 17, I told them again,



MELANIE JONES



in stronger, more confident terms. They were actually quite accepting. My father took it a little harder, because I was the only boy, and back then it was so important to continue the family name. But in the end, they were truly supportive. They never expressed any regrets about who I was, or wished I could have been different. I couldn't have asked for more supportive parents.

I'd always loved history and knew that history was a good guide for avoiding the mistakes of the past. When I was growing up, WWII was still a fresh experience. The neighborhood fathers had served in the War and had seen first-hand what happened within Nazi Germany. It's true what they say: First they come for the Jews, and then they come for the gay people, and then the next minority they find undesirable. If people are willing to look, history can teach us.

Stonewall happened just before my 17th birthday. I still didn't know any openly gay people, although I suspected one guy at school because he was feminine, even slightly flamboyant. And, you know, that was how gay people were seen in the media by the late sixties, as "queens."

I didn't really relate to that stereotype at all. I knew I was gay, but I didn't feel I needed to be demonstrative. Don't get me wrong, I knew who I was, and I didn't care if people knew who I was. I just didn't feel required to act in one way or another because I was gay.

HOW DID YOU FIND YOUR COMMUNITY?

I started the Young Democrats of Washington County organization and started going to Democratic Party events. I met a lot of people, and some were rumored to be gay, but I wasn't sure how to approach them. I finally decided to go down to Milwaukee, and see what gay life looked like, because I wanted to get more involved.

So, I went to a Gay People's Union meeting. Oh, my God, was I nervous. I drove around the block several times. Then I parked a block away and just watched who was going in. I was really concerned the police might raid the meeting. Finally, I worked up the courage to walk into this meeting—and there's the guy I knew from the Young Democrats! He invited me to his place, took me out to the gay bars, and introduced me to gay people. It was such a happy discovery to have someone who could bring me out. It was a great introduction to gay life in Milwaukee.

Gay People's Union was so intensely political back then. I know it had to be, because there was no one else fighting for the community, but it was a bit overwhelming. I wanted to understand the social side of gay life, and they were planning one protest after another after another. I attended a few meetings, but it just got to be too much. I wasn't ready for that. And I know it frustrated a lot of those early organizers, that the community just wasn't ready to step up like that.

Politics weren't the basis of the community back then. For better or worse, it was the bars. The drinking age was 18, so I could go to bars, and that was my gateway to everything. That's how I became aware of GAMMA. It was a sports-themed social group back then, and that led me to join other groups. The bars were kind of like a community center, where you'd meet people, learn about the things they did, and decide what you wanted to do. There was so much to do!

Some of my favorites were the River Queen, the Wreck Room, the Factory, and M&M. That triangle was just fantastic. I remember going between those bars in the Third Ward every weekend. It was a dead area of town at the time. After dark, the only people on the street were gay people. You'd meet more people outside the bars on the sidewalks than inside them. That's all long gone now.

Bars weren't trying to be found. They were somewhat anonymous. They weren't always signed, you rarely used the front door, and there were no windows. There might be a light outside the door and the street address. Once you were inside, it was quiet, because there wasn't really any street traffic. The Factory was different. That was a destination where everyone went to dance, hang

out, and see all the fabulous people. The Factory had a sign outside!

Even the customers were anonymous. You might exchange first names and phone numbers, but never last names. And sometimes, people might even say "that's not my real name, but it's what I go by in the gay bars." Everyone had a nickname. People were extremely cautious and extremely closeted. You never knew if your workplace would find out, and what they might do. The police were especially homophobic, and out for gay people. So, you were absolutely on guard all the time.



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I don't remember anyone ever asking why. This is just how it was and how it was always assumed to be.

WHY DO YOU THINK LGBTQ PEOPLE DON'T KNOW THEIR HISTORY?

Nobody ever talked about the past. This shouldn't be a surprise. People weren't always proud of the past. The past was often a source of anger, embarrassment, and shame. The present was so unpredictable and unstable. Gay liberation was all about the future.

You have to understand most gay people grew up believing they were alone in the world. Imagine finding this was untrue all along. What would your first reaction be? You'd be focused on making up for lost time for the rest of your life. The clock was ticking. There was no time to worry about what went before.

Nobody talked about the old bars. Sure, we got fragments here and there. People might mention things in passing, like a bar's former ad-

Even the customers were anonymous. You might exchange first names and phone numbers, but never last names. And sometimes, people might even say "that's not my real name, but it's what I go by in the gay bars."

dress or owner, but there was no documentation. Different people would remember things differently and there wasn't one source of truth. These conversations were maddening. Nobody knew anything for sure, even the people who thought they knew everything!

When the Factory closed, I was just devastated, because we lost this epic liberation landmark. That's when I started thinking, someone

should preserve these things. I never expected it to be me. I never wanted to draw attention to myself. I don't consider myself a public speaker, and I hate doing interviews. And I was afraid to take cameras into bars because it was simply not done. Today, people are used to having every moment of their day photographed; back then, people worried that their photo would wind up in the newspapers.

Still, one of my greatest regrets ever was not getting photos inside The Factory, because I've never found any photos anywhere. I'm sure that Chuck Cicirello had photos, but he never shared any before he died, nor did any of the people he recommended to me. I always hope someone will step forward with an album of photos.

HOW DID YOU START BUILDING YOUR COLLECTION?

Without any documentation, we had no sense of who or what we were, only a few years earlier. It was left entirely to the interpretation of the few people who were there and willing to talk about it.

By the late 1970s, we started seeing gay periodicals, including *Gay Milwaukee* and *Milwaukee Calendar*, and I realized this was the documentation we'd been missing. So, I started collecting all the periodicals I could get my hands on. If even libraries weren't going to chronicle our history, I decided I had to do it myself, and I just kept on collecting them. Eventually, I started scanning them for the website, and the rest is history. Today, we have the largest collection of LGBTQ multimedia in the state.

One of my biggest regrets was donating all my hard copies to the Cream City Foundation. When they moved from Walker's Point to the Enterprise Center, they had a water main break, and everything was destroyed. From that point on, I didn't really trust anyone with my hard

copies, and certainly not any gay organizations. There wasn't a whole lot of stability back then. Organizations would form, and then move from office to office. To this day, many of them still don't have permanent offices. I realized if I don't save this stuff, nobody is going to do it for us, and I can't really count on anyone else to keep the materials safe either.

People didn't understand why it was important to keep all these old "bar rags," and that's what made it even more important for me.

YOUR COMMUNITY SERVICE WASN'T JUST LIMITED TO HISTORY AND EDUCATION. WHAT ROLES HAVE YOU PLAYED IN MILWAUKEE LGBTQ NON-PROFIT GROUPS?

In addition to my full-time career, I was on the board of Cream City Foundation for over 10 years, including eight as president. I was also on the board of GAMMA for eight years, with one year as president.

When the AIDS crisis struck, I was part of the team that spun off the Milwaukee AIDS Project from BESTD Clinic and founded the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin (now Vivent Health). I was ARCW's first vice-president of the board of directors.

I worked in the cash room at PrideFest Milwaukee for over 20 years, as well as managing the festival's History Exhibit. I ended that relationship in 2019.

In 2007, I helped launch Milwaukee Guerilla Gay Bar, which hosted First Friday bar takeovers for 10 years. I've also volunteered for the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center and BESTD Clinic.

WHY WAS STONEWALL25 SUCH A TURNING POINT IN LGBTQ HISTORY?

Stonewall25 brought more than one million people to New York City to celebrate the cultural impact of the 1969 uprising. Most people didn't realize the Stonewall Inn closed in fall 1969, not to reopen until 1991. So, we had this tremendous reverence for "history," without any real clarity or continuity. You started hearing these stories about who threw the first brick, who threw a shot glass, who was there and wasn't there.

Meanwhile, AIDS became the leading cause of death for Americans 25-34 that year, and over 300,000 Americans had died since 1981. It became apparent that gay people needed to get their stories straight and talk to the people who were part of the revolution before it was too late.

There was just this tremendous sense of continuous, never-ending loss, not just of loved ones, and community, but something greater. It felt like our entire way of life was at risk of extinction. And until this time, nobody had really made a significant effort to preserve our history and heritage, because we always felt we were still in the process of

Most gay people grew up believing they were alone in the world. Imagine finding this was untrue all along. What would your first reaction be? You'd be focused on making up for lost time for the rest of your life.

becoming, and not fully formed enough to be considered historic.

But that's the year people started to realize how much history we'd already lost. We weren't becoming anymore. We were unraveling. We were disappearing.

I'd never met Louis Stimac, one of the founders of Gay People's Union, and a historian of his own merit. Louis, as incredible as it seems, taught a 10-part gay history course at the Milwaukee Free University and the GPU Farwell Center in the 70s. I don't know how he did it, considering the lack of access and appreciation for gay history. He made national headlines for his program. Unfortunately, many reporters found the idea of gay history ridiculous. A local reporter even asked, "How can gays have their own history when they're not even legal citizens?"

At PrideFest 1994, Jamakaya and Steve Brandino collaborated on the first LGBTQ history timeline. The display was fantastic for the time, but by today's standards, it might seem very sparse and skeletal. For

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didn't really have any real volunteer support until 2006.

I have to be honest, though, I never really had a long-range plan for the History Project. Yes, I worked with the UWM Archives and other partners to preserve our physical content. But the "organization" was very loosely organized. It was a personal hobby. It was just this thing I did. I knew at some point I'd want to pass it on to somebody, so they could preserve the history. For the past 20 years, my will has outlined what happens to the collection when I'm gone. There's always been someone in mind to take over the History Project when I left.

And now, there's a clear organization that can carry this work forward. The project needs continual energy and a solid commitment. If we agree to something, we've got to show up and do it. That's another reason this was a good time to let go. We have that energy now. We have those people now. So, I feel confident, in retiring from the day-to-day, knowing that my 30-year passion project is in great hands.

FOR DECADES, YOU WERE THE ONLY LGBTQ HISTORY PROJECT IN WISCONSIN. HOW DOES IT FEEL WATCHING NEW PROJECTS POP UP AROUND THE STATE?

Listen, I applaud everyone who is doing the work to make our history stronger. As more organizations emerge, I just hope we can avoid being territorial. I've reached out to some organizations seeking partnership and collaboration, only to be told no, we're doing this all on our own.

I hope the future brings more collaboration with history projects not just locally in Wisconsin, but regionally and even nationally. We can all learn so much from each other.

HOW WILL YOU BE SPENDING YOUR RETIREMENT YEARS?

My number one mission in life is to wake up in the morning and do what I want to do. I don't want to have any deadlines. I don't want to have any assignments.

I'm sure this won't surprise anyone at all, but I'll never be able to quit the History Project completely. I will be working with Rockstar Design, our website agency, on the next phase of the redesign, while adding content here and there that I've accumulated over the years. I'll always be responding to the ever-changing nightlife scene. When the Blue Lite closed recently in Sheboygan, we put a plan in action and quickly updated our site and social media with the latest photos. I like those just-in-time opportunities to capture history as it happens.

WHERE DO YOU HOPE THE HISTORY PROJECT WILL GO NEXT?

We've had a semi-permanent exhibit on display at This Is It since their 50th anniversary in 2018. I'd love to see the History Project find a permanent home, somewhere in old gay Milwaukee, and I have some very firm ideas where it should be.

At one time, I would have been happy just to see the collection preserved. Now, I want to see it expanded upon in all sorts of new directions. Our Community Advisors have created inroads for us that I simply could not have created for myself. We now have volunteers in every corner of Wisconsin, as well as relationships with pride and support organizations throughout Wisconsin. People have really stepped up and volunteered not only their time and skills, but their connections and communities. We simply could not reflect the true diversity of Wisconsin without them.

So, when people ask, why don't you have more ____ on the website, why don't you have more ____ in your archives? I have to remind people that participation matters. We've been an all-volunteer organization for our entire existence. We've been entirely dependent on people willing to not only be interviewed but conduct the interviews. We are not

MELANIE JONES.

funded by sponsors, nor sustaining grants, nor do we have a single person focused on this work as a full-time job. We've had to be resourceful and strategic to get the content we have. I'm grateful that we've built out these long-needed branches of history.

Truth be told, we need more stories about Black, brown, and Asian LGBTQ people. We need more documentation about the leather scene, the pageant scene, and the trans community. We need more bisexual representation. We need more of everything, frankly. But it's easy to come with wishlists, it's another thing to dig in and do the work.

So that's why I am stepping away. While I have the knowledge, I just no longer have the time or energy. Our Board and Community Advisors are moving in so many directions, with so many new and diverse ideas, and so many new skills and talents. They are going to propel this group for the next 20-30 years. Who am I to stand in the way of that?

WHAT WAS YOUR PROUDEST MOMENT OF THE PAST 30 YEARS?

There are so many little moments. Getting the rainbow crosswalks built in Milwaukee. Collaborating with Dick Wagner on his books. Joining forces with Milwaukee Preservation Alliance to save the Wreck Room Saloon from demolition.

But, without a doubt, nothing beats the state historical marker for the Black Nite Brawl. What a moment in time. Three years ago, when we hosted the 60th anniversary, it seemed like it was going to be such an uphill battle to get a historic marker. We were actually denied the first time we applied. So, to see the Mayor, the County Executive, the Wisconsin Historical Society, and so many community members come together for such a big day. That was really humbling. Truly, truly humbling.

It was the first LGBTQ and trans-inclusive historic marker out of 600+ in the state marker program. That just tells you how important it

was that we did this work. I came out a decade after the Black Nite. It was already hidden history by that time. There's absolutely no way this story would have survived Josie Carter's passing if not for our research.

After you do something this big, there really is no encore, but somehow, I believe the History Project will outdo themselves.

IF YOU COULD GO BACK IN TIME TO ANY WISCONSIN GAY BAR, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

You know, that's a good question. I've always been curious about the Seaway Inn (744 N. Jefferson). It was such a unique little space, this little stone cottage sitting on the corner of Jefferson and Mason, and it was probably the first gay bar in Milwaukee owned by an openly gay person (Otto Schuller, and his myna bird) that welcomed gay people. Can you imagine walking in there in 1959? What could we learn?

YOU'VE SPENT THE PAST THREE DECADES STUDYING THE GAY BARS OF THE PAST. WHAT DO THE GAY BARS OF THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE?

I honestly hope there are always gay bars. I think the days of Milwaukee having 20-30 gay bars are long behind us, but I certainly hope we don't lose any more. There's such a thing as feeling at home with your people. I don't think gay people can ever truly feel at home in a straight bar. There's something about walking into a bar, thinking, "Everyone here is a potential interest," that I think both men and women appreciate. They may not be community centers anymore, like they once were, but they are certainly comfort centers.

I think the closing of the Blue Lite really brought this back home for me. The owners' closing announcement on Facebook said that after 32 years, they didn't think Sheboygan needed a gay bar anymore. And the Facebook audience responded, over and over, that they do still need the Blue Lite, because they will always need their own gay space in history.

I think that's an important message for us all to hear. ■

example, they had a list of one hundred or so bar names, but there were no details: No addresses, no timeframes, no owners, no anecdotes. It was just a big, long list they'd crowdsourced. They weren't documenting history across the decades. I wanted to tell people about the experiences people had in these spaces, and why these places came to be in the first place. But all we had were bar names, and people couldn't agree those!

The next year, they worked with Cream City Foundation to create and distribute an 11x17 pamphlet about LGBTQ history. However, they claimed full copyright control over the content, saying nobody could use that information. And then, they stopped working with PrideFest and wouldn't surrender the copyright or the content. Even the big Pridefest displays were withheld.

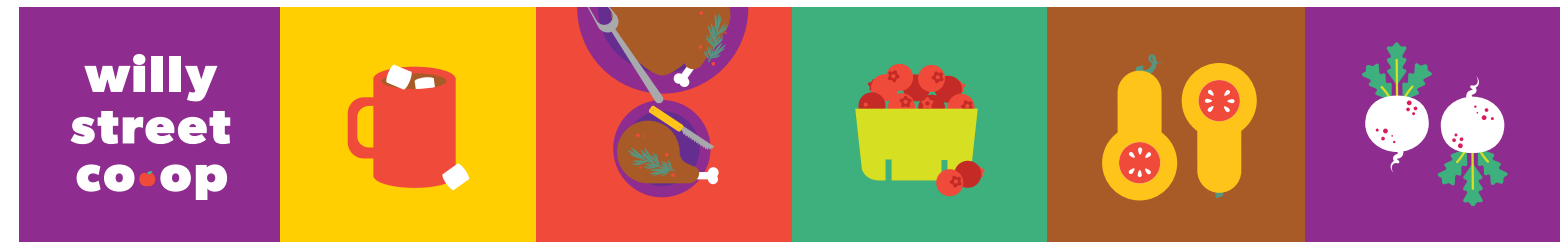
To me, history is for sharing. History is no good when it's sitting in someone's back pocket. History must be exposed for the world to see.

HOW DID YOU BUILD BACK BETTER?

Without any access to the Stonewall25 exhibits, I had to start over from scratch. I started rummaging through GPU News for mentions, references, ads, photos, anything I could to build out a timeline. And I have to hand it to those early illustrators, because it was literally someone sitting down with a thick pen and hand-drawing an image for publication.

When I started the History Project, there was no internet or social media. There was no on-demand access to anything. There were no digital documents. There weren't even cell phones. When I first started the website, dial-up internet was so slow that our pages only had tiny thumbnail images. Carousels, videos, and entire issue PDFs were completely out of the question. Technology has certainly made it easier to access our content, but it's also increased expectations of what a website experience should look like. And when information can be presented in an immersive, engaging way, it only increases people's interest in history. If you can capture someone's interest with visuals, you can get them reading the content, and you can inspire them into getting involved.

Now, keep in mind, this was a passion project for me, but it was still a lot of work. I did all the research, writing, and scanning for the first 15 years. I personally hand-coded thousands of website pages for almost 30 years. I managed all hosting, security, domains, email, and servers myself. And I paid, out of pocket, for all expenses involved in these duties. While I asked for volunteers to assist me year after year after year, I



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HEALTH & WELLNESS | TEXTBOOKS | LGBTQ HEALTH | HEALTH SCIENCE CURRICULUM

Reforming Medical Education One Book at a Time

Dr. James R. Lehman is a senior editor for the textbook *The Equal Curriculum: The Student and Educator Guide to LGBTQ Health*. Here, he answers questions about the unique textbook and its origins.

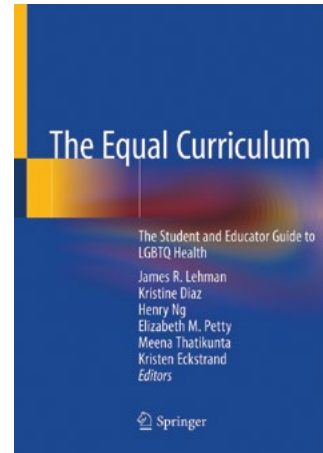
THE EQUAL CURRICULUM: *The Student and Educator Guide to LGBTQ Health* is a first-of-its-kind textbook. It marks a revolutionary effort to reform medical education nationally by providing a comprehensive, high-quality resource to serve as a foundation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) health education across multiple disciplines. Addressing the decades-long unequal weight of medical education generally offered about the care of LGBTQ people, *The Equal Curriculum* was created to advance clinicians' competencies in optimizing the health of LGBTQ people. This textbook is designed to be integrated into health sciences curricula and offers pointed strategies to evaluate the integration of LGBTQ health topics.

WHAT INSPIRED THE WRITING OF THE EQUAL CURRICULUM?

The need seemed obvious. As a year 2 medical student, I went to the conference for GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality and learned that efforts in schools across the country were often student-driven and duplicative. People were doing great work, but there was nothing to fill the niche. At the same time, a survey of medical schools found that minimal class time was put toward LGBTQ health, and coverage of topics was spotty. Some students, including me, assembled the content experts and the senior editors to write the text. The rest is history.

WHAT'S SPECIAL ABOUT THE BOOK?

It's for health professions students and based on standards proposed by education experts. It is the only book for that niche so far. It fits into real-world training sequences. The project brought together dozens of contribu-



tors from across the country. What's surprised me is that people in wider-ranging careers have found initial chapters on terminology and professional interactions useful. Recently, I met a retired social worker who wanted those chapters to support her church's outreach efforts.

WHAT'S AN UNEXPECTED ASPECT OF THE PROJECT?

The volunteers assembled were top-shelf—serious, knowledgeable, and skilled. At the same time, coordinating opinionated professionals and trainees isn't easy. People graduate, move, and change jobs. We did not know at the beginning that Springer would be our publisher. By that time, every chapter had to be revised because writing took so long. I felt I was the little tugboat pulling along a hulking project with the assent of the huge team, but I was a very junior member. I had to trust my judgment.

ARE YOU HOPEFUL FOR LGBTQ HEALTH CARE?

This question deserves another book. Working with students and physician residents, an absence of discomfort with LGBTQ identities is evident. Students fear causing offense or express frustration over not being taught enough. The youth are ahead of the curve.

Diffusion of even the cut-and-dried medical knowledge into everyday practice is slow. Ideas subject to internal biases or overt bigotry take effort and time. The study I mentioned before was repeated, and very little progress was made in terms of LGBTQ content.

Keeping hope isn't easy. If you talk to educators, they'll say, "If you want to spend time on LGBTQ health, what are you going to cut time from?" Trying to engage leaders and administrators in health care systems about the things that LGBTQ people worry about—and

their ability to misunderstand and forget the modern-day applicability of ideas like minority stress and consequences of historical pathologization—will feel like Groundhog Day.

HOW CAN EVERYDAY LGBTQ PEOPLE FIX THINGS?

From an advocacy standpoint, there are committees for patients and families for improving clinical care. They are not LGBTQ-specific, but being the active community member who takes the time and brings a different perspective is valuable. Community members also sit on the local board of health. If you're someone who cares about water sanitation or vaccinations, consider your insider status a reason to get involved. If you are comfortable doing this work, join in. Whether, when, and how is up to you.

Loneliness a big deal in public health right now. Anyone who does community organizing against loneliness would be a hero.

SWITCHING GEARS, WHAT ARE THE GREATEST THREATS TO LGBTQ HEALTH RIGHT NOW?

For starters, it's the same as the problems of the health of all people in the USA, but concentrated. Socioeconomic conditions and personal behaviors are the biggest determinants of health, though medical science has its place. Increasingly, loneliness is recognized as its own dimension of toxic exposure. I think that as a group, LGBTQ people confront greater loneliness with special challenges.

Care delivery and insurance systems are only becoming worse for everyone. More vulnerable groups face greater disadvantages from prior authorizations, third-party benefits managers, and employer-sponsored insurances. So it's not the issues that are special to LGBTQ people that are realistically the greatest threats; it's how as a special group it's harder to survive in a bad system.

The foul political winds also blow. Trans kids are political punching-bags, and lies propagate about gender-affirming care for minors. Between the reporting on medicine and sport, there has been measurable harm to youth mental health. This echoes previous periods when marriage equality was debated by legislatures.

WHAT INTERFERES WITH CARE FOR LGBTQ PEOPLE? WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

First, it's fear itself. That's an internal barrier. We have internal expectations of bad experiences and avoid care. Preventive and routine acute care get pushed aside. This includes cancer screenings, vaccinations, infections, etc.

Second, there's often a lack of knowledge or familiarity on the patient or clinician sides. You need to be your own advocate. Not everyone will have—or need—a primary care

provider who is an expert in LGBTQ medicine or gender-affirming care. However, these days it is usually possible to find one who is accepting and receptive to learning. In that case, it is important to see any innocent mistakes your PCP makes as opportunities for learning.

Some may be frustrated that self-advocacy as a minority is unfair labor and extra stress. It is. Yet without it health care will not improve, and you may not get the quality of care that you deserve. Being out and clear in your needs helps not only you but other patients serviced by your clinician. It is a quietly radical act.

GLMA provides recommendations for health priorities for different groups. There are regional and national directories where clinicians can opt-in as LGBTQ-friendly or providers of gender affirming care, so it is gradually becoming easier to find good clinicians. Psychologytoday.com, some health care systems like Advocate Aurora, and some local LGBTQ community centers maintain their own lists, too. It is worth the effort to check. NAMI Wisconsin has a good list of resources, too.

ANY FINAL THOUGHTS?

If you or someone you know would like the text, it's available on Amazon, Springer, or SpringerLink (a library database).

Besides my advice on self- and community-advocacy, the other idea I'd like to repeat

is how important social bonds are. Social media is great as a part of a greater scheme of social and civic participation. Even before COVID-19, third spaces where people could spontaneously meet and mingle were drying up. I think that is both a cause and symptom of a greater problem of how the collective "we" have arranged our lives. I think both minority communities and larger communities need to think hard about stable spaces and events that can help people feel less divided. ■

Dr. James R. Lehman is a board-certified psychiatrist. He received his undergraduate degree from UW-Madison with emphasis in neurobiology. He then completed medical school and earned his Master of Public Health at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. As a student, he was part of the program Training in Urban Medicine and Public Health in Milwaukee, demonstrating his commitment to the un-



deserved, population health, and health equity. He is an advocate for better LGBTQ health care on local and national levels. His areas of expertise are severe and persistent mental illness and LGBTQ mental health including gender-affirming care.



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HEALTH & WELLNESS DIRECT PRIMARY CARE LGBTQ HEALTH CARE

Centering Care in Health Care

Direct Primary Care is Dr. Angela Marchant's antidote to the broken healthcare system that is needed for queer communities. She and other physicians in the area are adopting this care-centered system of care.

thought she had lost. Moving away from the system where she was paid to see people when they were ill, to a system where she was paid to facilitate prevention, allowed her to practice medicine with a true emphasis on healing. The time this model afforded allowed her to provide her patients the care that they needed addressing all their complaints in an unrushed, compassionate space. Several months later, she left her job within the traditional healthcare system and opened Tallgrass Direct Primary Care.

Direct Primary Care (DPC) is an innovative healthcare model that removes the traditional barriers between patients and physicians by eliminating insurance companies from the equation. Instead, patients pay a monthly membership fee directly to their healthcare provider, ensuring unlimited access and a more personalized healthcare experience. This model is particularly well-suited for the queer community. Building a relationship with your primary care doctor, someone who believes you and is eager to partner with you to find your health, not just disease, is an antidote sorely needed in the queer community. Instead of facing the dysregulation of the cisgender, heteronormative, capitalist healthcare industrial complex, DPC allows folks to be who they are and, without consistently reexplaining themselves or hiding themselves, can be cared for as they are.

1. PERSONALIZED & INCLUSIVE CARE

One of the most significant benefits of DPC is the ability to offer personalized care tailored to individual needs. For the queer community, this means care that is not only tailored to their specific health concerns but also delivered in an environment that is inclusive and affirming. DPC allows physicians to spend more time with their patients, fostering a deeper understanding of their unique healthcare needs. This can include specialized care for hormone therapy, mental health support, and sexual health services, all delivered with sensitivity and respect.

2. ENHANCED PATIENT-PROVIDER RELATIONSHIPS

The DPC model emphasizes strong, trusting relationships between patients and their providers. For members of the queer community, who may have experienced discrimination or misunderstanding in traditional healthcare settings, this can be incredibly valuable. With

DPC, patients have direct access to their physician, often via phone, text, or email, leading to better communication and more immediate care. This ongoing, open dialogue ensures that health care is both proactive and responsive to the patient's lifestyle and identity.

3. ACCESSIBILITY & AFFORDABILITY

DPC can also be more affordable than traditional healthcare models, particularly for those without insurance or with high-deductible plans. By eliminating the overhead costs associated with insurance billing, DPC practices can offer transparent pricing and often lower overall costs. This affordability makes it easier for members of the queer community, who may face economic disparities, to access consistent and comprehensive care without financial strain.

4. FOCUS ON PREVENTIVE CARE

Preventive care is a cornerstone of the DPC model, allowing physicians to focus on maintaining health and preventing chronic conditions. This is particularly beneficial for the queer community, which may face increased health risks due to stress, stigma, and lack of access to culturally competent care. By prioritizing prevention and wellness, DPC helps patients manage their health proactive-

ly, reducing the risk of complications and improving overall quality of life.

The traditional healthcare system does not serve patients, nor is it sustainable for physicians. The local DPC movement is growing. Dr. Wendy Molaska with Dedicated Family Care in Fitchburg also champions care for underserved communities in the traditional healthcare system. Dr. Giselle Argento Berrío is opening a DPC clinic on the northside of Madison and similarly is passionate about gender-affirming care, support letters for surgery, PrEP, and doxyPEP among other standard primary care offerings for queer communities.

Since opening Tallgrass, Dr. Angela has welcomed many queer families and individuals. A family chose to seek her care because while they love their PCP within the system they were frustrated with needing to consistently correct nursing staff about their child's preferred pronouns. Another trans patient chose DPC because they "just want to be believed." Direct Primary Care offers a patient-centered, inclusive, and accessible healthcare option that aligns perfectly with the needs of the queer community. By fostering strong patient-provider relationships, ensuring affordability, and focusing on personalized care, DPC provides a supportive environment where all individuals can thrive. ■

WHEN DR. ANGELA MARCHANT practiced within the traditional healthcare system as a part-time Family Medicine physician, she had 1300 medically and socially complex patients assigned to her as their Primary Care doctor. Patients often waited for months to get an appointment, rarely could see her for urgent needs, and were left waiting for answers to their medical concerns because of short staffing and an overwhelming burden of work. After a tumultuous postpartum experience, recovering from an emergency cesarean and breastfeeding struggles with her second son, Dr. Angela had little capacity left to face the brokenness of the system.

As an osteopath, she always believed in the body's inherent ability to heal itself. She was able to beautifully practice osteopathic manual medicine, a form of bodywork which gave rise to many Western bodywork traditions, including chiropractic, craniosacral, and myofascial release. But within the system, she couldn't get her patients in for the follow-up they needed and deserved. So in January 2024, she opened Tallgrass Osteopathic Family Medicine, offering osteopathic manual medicine one day a week to the Madison community.

Being able to practice in a setting outside of the system revealed to her a creativity she



Marchant

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HEALTH & WELLNESS | GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE | LGBTQ-FRIENDLY PROVIDERS

Safe Providers

The **LGBT Center of Southeast Wisconsin** is leading the effort to connect the transgender, nonbinary, and gender-diverse communities with affirming health-centered resources across Wisconsin.

WHEN I ARRIVED at the appointment to start my HRT journey, I was already on the defensive. I hadn't a clue how I was going to be perceived or treated; would they question my decision and try to make me prove I was "trans enough?" When I told them I was nonbinary and only wanted to start with a low dose of testosterone, would they tell me it wasn't an option? Would they discourage me? Would they force me to see a therapist first? I knew who I was but would they sense my apprehension and assume it was uncertainty? Terrified of being mistreated and let down, I silently rehearsed every rebuttal to every anticipated rejection as I was taken to the examination room.

Squeezing the color out of my interlaced fingers, I sat rigid across from the nurse—my

heart caught in my throat. With an unexpected inviting demeanor, Nurse Bre introduced herself and asked me for my preferred name and pronouns. What? I had only prepared to be challenged or dismissed; so, bewildered, I stumbled out, "Uh, no one has really ever asked me that before... So, I guess, any pronouns are fine?" When Nurse Practitioner Anne came in with the same kindness and confidence, I finally allowed my shoulders to drop away from my ears. I was in a safe space.

Finding gender-affirming medical and mental health providers or services is often a daunting and terrifying game of trial and error; sometimes, it can even feel down-right unsafe. We enter clinics and hope our deadname isn't called out in a room full of strangers. We hope our provider won't dismiss us or intentionally misgender us. We shift uncomfortably in our seats as our pen hovers over the intake form, drifting back and forth between the "M" and "F" boxes. We ask our queer friends for recommendations, or we forego seeking any care. We deserve better—and our providers agree.

THE LGBT CENTER OF SOUTHEAST WISCONSIN

My name is Kez, and as part of a grant-funded project provided by the United Way of Racine County, I was hired as the Transgender and Nonbinary Resource Coordinator at The LGBT Center of Southeast Wisconsin, located in Racine. My role has primarily been to initiate the creation of a statewide provider resource platform that would connect the transgender, nonbinary, and gender-diverse communities with affirming health-centered resources across Wisconsin. Additionally, we've developed a comprehensive training program for providers and local community leaders on gender diversity inclusivity.

As a transmasculine nonbinary human, I can attest to the many barriers to finding affirming and appropriate health care. One major barrier is the lack of visibility of gender-affirming and LGBTQ+ allied providers and services. It's frighteningly difficult and discouraging to attain information on safe providers without knowing

someone—who knows someone—who can give a recommendation. The LGBT Center of Southeast Wisconsin is changing that!

STATEWIDE PROVIDER RESOURCE DIRECTORY

What makes the difference with this directory is that every provider listed on our website is voluntarily self-submitted; that is, each provider has taken the time to add themselves to the directory, demonstrating a passion toward equity and inclusion that goes above and beyond their professional oath. These providers have elected themselves as being intentionally inclusive, respectful of gender identities, sexual orientations, and pronouns, and promised dedication to educating themselves on the unique needs of the LGBTQ+ community.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

The new webpage (lgbtsewi.org/providers) offers a range of providers and resources delivering various services, and our directory is expanding every day. We invite you to visit the website and share it with friends, colleagues, and family who may be hesitant about seeking services. Your support is essential! We also ask for your help encouraging your favorite gender-affirming medical and mental health professionals to submit their information so others in the community can find them, too!

If you encounter a provider on the list who doesn't meet your gender-affirming expectations, please reach out to us anonymously through the provider page. We'll review all concerns, provide feedback/offer training to the provider, and assess whether or not they should remain listed.

Also, please reach out via the contact form on the website with any inquiries regarding the Transgender and Nonbinary Provider Resource Training for your clinic! This training can also be modified for any office, group, or other community facing service.

The goal of this project has been simple: Improve our local culture to be more inclusive of the transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming communities in health care and whole-person health. Everyone deserves safe and supportive access to medical and mental health care. Gender-affirming care goes beyond



KEZ CESARZ is the Transgender & Nonbinary Resource Coordinator at The LGBT Center of Southeast Wisconsin. Through their work at The Center and their podcast "New Pronouns, Who Dis?" Kez aims to demystify the trans experience and promote understanding.

medical transition; sometimes it simply means being able to confidently enter a provider's office knowing you are safe to come as you are and will be treated with respect and dignity re-

gardless of your gender identity or expression. Please help expand this resource throughout the state! Visit lgbtsewi.org/providers for a detailed list of providers and their services. ■

Gender-affirming Medical and Mental Health Providers & Services

Below is a preview list of providers already on our website. Please visit lgbtsewi.org/providers for a more detailed list of providers and their services.

APPLETON

- Angie Schneider, Therapy +
- Emily Belongia/Therapy +
- Healthy Healing Solutions, LLC
- Julie Fischer/ Full Circle Counseling
- Megan Doxtator, LCSW, PMH-C

BROOKFIELD

- Every Little Fiber

CEDARBURG

- Mx. Sam Schommer, MS, LPC

CUDAHY

- Jordan Schultz, Aurora Health Care

DEPERE

- Counseling & Consulting Professionals, LLC
- In Focus Counseling, LLC
- Jenna Belongia, LPC

EAU CLAIRE

- Cory Tischman, Eclipse Counseling

GLENDALE

- Amy Perkins
- Becca Kiskey, Rawhide Youth Services
- Christopher Borden, MA, LPC, CSAC
- Colleen W. Baird, LPC
- Laura Carter (Karan) PhD/ Licensed Psychologist
- Teresa Buss, Rawhide Youth Services
- Thomas Galten, Therapy +

GREEN BAY

- Sarah Swarts, MD/ Aurora Health Care

GREENFIELD

- Abigail Cohn, Therapy +
- Laura M. Harrigan, DC Aurora Health Care

JANESVILLE

- Kelly Ringhand, Therapy +

KENOSHA

- AMRI Counseling Services
- Jeffrey Tiemstra, MD Aurora Health Care
- Zara Abu-Hamdan, Therapy +

LA CROSSE

- Conscious Practice

MADISON

- Allison Bender Strengths-Focused Therapy, LLC
- Allison Ommodt, MSE, LPC-IT
- Anne Perry, LPC
- Counseling Psychology Training Clinic
- Dean Amethyst Dvorak, Therapy +
- Madison Neuropsychological Services, LLC
- QUEST Counseling and Consultation
- Reflections Mental Health, LLC
- Tyler Madro MS, LPC-IT
- William Hutter/Therapy +

MENOMONEE FALLS

- Medical College of Wisconsin's Inclusion Health Clinic

MEQUON

- Mosaic Counseling
- Wildstone Wellness

MIDDLETON

- Jennifer Reckner, MA, LPC

MILWAUKEE

- AMRI Counseling Services
- Amy Kristner, LifeStance Health
- Andrew Petroll, Froedtert
- Anne David, MSW, LCSW Jewish Family Services
- Annie Lakatos, MCW & Froedtert Inclusion Clinic
- Cayla Lund, LifeStance Health
- Compassionate Clinical Services, LLC
- Dr. Anna Mirer, Presence Primary Care
- Emma Reader, MSW, LCSW Aurora Healing Center
- Erik Stonecipher, MS, LPC, ADHD-CCSP
- FitPOWER, LLC
- Greater Love Birth and Community Care
- Harley Emberson/Therapy +
- Inclusion Health Clinic Medical College of Wisconsin
- Jonathan Bock Medical College of Wisconsin
- Kevin Robertson, MD, Froedtert
- Kristen Wilde, MD, Aurora Health Care
- Lisa Calabrese, LifeStance Health
- Marie Forgie, DO, Aurora Health Care
- Mary Rinnert/Therapy +
- Moneesha Roy/ Froedtert
- North Node Clinic
- Nova Mental Health Services
- Steve Wipijewski, DO, Aurora Health Care
- Tony Davis-Maxwell, MD
- Victoria Gillet, MD, Aurora Health Care

MONONA

- Angela Waldoch, MS, LPC, ATR Kettle Moraine Counseling

MUKWONAGO

- Sandy Adams, PhD

OCONOMOWOC

- Christina Meyer, MD Aurora Health Care
- MyPath

OSHKOSH

- Oshkosh Marriage & Family Therapy Center

PLYMOUTH

- Julianne Nevers, PA-C, Aurora Health Care

PORT WASHINGTON

- Dr. Victoria Sepulveda Waterways Counseling & Consulting

RACINE

- Aaron Munson, LPC
- Erika Wagner-Martin, LPC
- Kristine Jacobs, LCSW
- Learnon R. McGinn, PT Advocate Aurora Health
- NAMI Racine County
- Sophia Prater ATR, LPC, CSAC, ICS-IT Wheaton Franciscan Ascension

SHEBOYGAN

- Michelle Rejman, MD Aurora Health Care
- Pamela Portschy, MD Aurora Health Care

STURGEON BAY

- Michael Aleksandrowicz, MD Aurora Health Care

SUN PRAIRIE

- Dulin Psychotherapy Services

TELEHEALTH ONLY

- Finn Phoenix, Therapy +

WAUKESHA

- Kevin Nelson, MD, Aurora Health Care

WAUSAU

- Behavioral Health Clinic

WAUWATOSA

- Adam Haggerty CLARA Healing Institute
- Callie Barfield, LPC
- Jessie Richardson, Therapy +
- Julie Offutt, LCSW, Aurora Health Care

WEST ALLIS

- Batul Valika, MD, Aurora Health Care
- Pathways Counseling Center

WEST BEND

- Julianne Morrison, Therapy +

ILLINOIS

- Brady Bunkelman, MS, CGC Advocate Health
- Gina Schueneman, DO Advocate Health
- Gordon Douglas Skeoch, MD Advocate Health
- Jeffrey Charles Ording, MD Advocate Health
- Jennifer Rossato, DO, Advocate Health
- Kevin Koo, MD, Advocate Health
- Lawrence Iteld, MD, Advocate Health
- Leah Delfinado, MD, Advocate Health
- Neilesh Shah, MD, Advocate Health
- Robert Martin, DO, Advocate Health
- Zachary Lamaster, DO Advocate Health



NETWORK WITH US

MISSION

OPEN welcomes diverse LGBTQ+ and allied professionals to share perspectives and experiences in connecting, developing, and building a vibrant community.

VISION

OPEN believes in demonstrating personal and professional leadership as stewards of an inclusive community where all are equal and valued.

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OPEN provides education and information resources regarding issues of gender and sexual diversity and other issues of professional concern to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBTQ) individuals who live in the Madison and Dane County, Wisconsin area.

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YOUTH | BISEXUAL | SELF-ACCEPTANCE | IDENTITY

Survival Guide

Kyanna Kramer shares her experience of coming to terms with her identity—and the adversity she faced and overcame—in the hope that her story can help others.

EVERYBODY HAS A STORY, and stories not only allow people to gain knowledge about you, but also allow them to use your experiences to help them persevere through their own struggles. Sometimes we dwell on the negative things that happen to us, without knowing how much our experiences may have been built into someone else's survival guide. Something that I have learned over time is that nothing in life that you go through defines you. Every action has a result, but no situation is permanent, and you never know who you may be helping by sharing your story.

LEARNING TO LOVE MYSELF

I would be lying if I said coming to terms with my identity was easy. There are things about myself that I used to wish I could change when I was little. Such as the fact that I am biracial and seen as “less than” by my peers almost daily. It is not only a battle against others, but a battle that I face everyday against myself. I used to feel like I had to tear myself down in order to see what the ignorant people see in me. Like agreeing that my hair was ugly, being called “exotic,” wearing it straight because I received more compliments than when it was curly, and never wearing braids because I felt like it was wrong. I even felt as though I couldn't openly label myself as bisexual because of what others may think. Like people telling me that bisexuality doesn't exist and being labeled as gay or straight when I choose to be with a man or woman. Pleasing other people became my top priority and getting myself to believe the negative opinions was only a part of it. This was my biggest adversity. Eventually, as I grew older, I learned that hiding who I am for the sake of pleasing ignorant minds made me just as ignorant as them.

FINDING SUPPORT ALONG THE WAY

Going on your self-love journey is not easy, but it is needed because sometimes you have to be willing to go through hard times in order to be prepared for better ones. The best piece of advice I have ever received was from a friend who once told me that I needed to learn to rely on others for support a little more. I found support in numerous groups at my high school and even still receive support from mentors that I have



grown to cherish along the way. Those people have taught me to love myself for who I am and never let others determine what my truth is. I have learned that support comes in many different forms, but the support that you give yourself is unmatched. The support I received taught me to embrace my curly hair, wear braids if that is what I like, and truly love whoever I would like to. It does not mean being ugly or “exotic,” or accepting the opinions of others; it means feeling truly comfortable in your own skin.

LEARNING AND GROWING

As an 18-year-old freshman in college, I am still learning to love every part of myself. There is so much I have to offer to the world, and I am truly destined for greatness. My message is to never get lost in negativity to the point where you longer feel the need to find your purpose. While I am still learning to love myself, I have grown tremendously and believe that the only opinion that truly matters is my own. My biggest adversity has become my most valuable lesson, and I use it to get through my most important battles. I hope that someone else can use this in their survival guide. ■

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— HANNAH, LIFELONG MEMBER



HANNAH'S STORY

While I never really struggled to make ends meet, I knew I had to manage my money better when I took on a bigger role in my godchildren's lives. With Summit's help, I paid down my debt and built a savings plan, and now we're taking a family cruise and steps toward a bigger home.

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