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March 2020 | PFLAG Council of Northern Illinois Newsletter

opendoors@pflagillinois.org

Monthly Open Doors

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You Do Make a Difference...

Show Up, Speak Up, Look Up, Team Up, Never Give Up ... and Be Counted

One of the things I love about my PFLAG family is hearing stories of how individuals are making a difference. There are countless stories and impacts, both big and small. But, all meaningful and important. There are lots of ways to make a difference.

It can be as simple as just being there for someone. As we have discussed before in these pages, affirmation matters. Just one supportive adult cuts the chance an LGBTQ+ youth will attempt suicide by 40% (<https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2019/07/just-one-supportive-adult-cuts-chance-lgbtq-youth-will-attempt-suicide-40/>).

For some, making a difference means staying in a place that may not currently be an affirming environment, only to be visible and be the steady voice of reason and enlightenment. As my friend Gail from PFLAG DuPage reminds me, sometimes it takes a bit of an irritant, like sand in an oyster, to help develop the pearls of enlightenment - "No Grit, No Pearl".

Making a difference can mean volunteering to be more active in your PFLAG Chapter, with a partner organization, or school, or with the PFLAG Council. Talk with your chapter leaders or email info@pflagillinois.org for info on positions.



Another way to make a difference is to bring your values to the polls. Be sure to review your choices in local, State and Federal elections and exercise your right and duty as a citizen to vote. Take a moment. Raise your right hand and say out loud... "I am a Voter". Perfect. Remember this part of your identity... YOU are a VOTER. So, just do it.



As an Open Doors reader, you know that I like to share articles, podcasts and videos I find of interest. I love TED Talks, and while this one is a bit older now, I still find the lessons on *making a difference* to be valuable and foundational to our work at PFLAG, and relevant in my personal and professional life as well. Rosabeth Moss Kanter shares her thoughts on changing the world in her Jan 2013 TED talk, [*Six keys to leading positive change*](#) (17:35).

Some of the key take-aways for me are:

- Show up – Your presence and involvement make a difference.
- Speak up – Find your voice and engage. Share your ideas and perspective.
- Look up to a higher vision- Share your values and vision of the future. Be guided by the big picture.
- Team up – Together we are stronger and can change the world.
- Never give up – Be relentless in your pursuit of the vision, but flexible in your approach.
- Lift others up – Communicate and share your successes. Appreciate and give credit to others

In love and solidarity,
John



ADVOCATES SUPPORT BILL REQUIRING K-12 PERSONAL HEALTH EDUCATION IN ILLINOIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Responsible Education for Adolescent and Children's Health (REACH) Act requires comprehensive, inclusive, and age-appropriate personal health and safety education to be taught in public schools in grades K-12

On Wednesday, Feb. 26, State Sen. Ram Villivalam, State Rep Kathleen Willis, and a group of advocates announced the Responsible Education for Adolescent and Children's Health (REACH) Act, which requires comprehensive, inclusive, and age-appropriate personal health and safety education for K-12 public schools in Illinois.

The bill is currently [Senate Amendment 1 to Senate Bill 2762](#).

Please take 2 actions:

- (1) Contact your state legislators in support of the the Responsible Education for Adolescent and Children's Health Act (SB 2762 and HB 4663). For support in contacting your state legislator, please reach out to Mike Ziri of Equality Illinois at mziri@eqil.org.
- (2) Call the offices of Sen. Villivalam and Rep. Willis to thank them for sponsoring the Responsible Education for Adolescent and Children's Health Act.
Sen. Villivalam: (217) 782-5500 and (872) 208-5188
Rep. Willis: (217) 782-3374 and (708) 562-6970

If passed, the REACH Act will be phased in, allowing schools adequate time and resources to implement quality programs. School districts will maintain control by selecting the curriculum and number of minutes for teaching. Parents will also retain the right to remove their child from sex education classes.

The REACH Act outlines age appropriate curriculum as:

- Grades K-2: instruction focuses on personal safety, identifying trusted adults who children can rely on for guidance and support, and respecting others.
- Grades 3-5: instruction continues to focus on personal safety and healthy relationships, discusses bullying, harassment, and abuse and covers topics such as anatomy, puberty, hygiene, body image, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.
- Grades 6-12: instruction builds on prior instruction about healthy relationships by covering issues like consent, sexual harassment, abuse, and interpersonal violence, provides additional information on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, and covers the benefits of abstinence, behavioral changes, barrier methods like condoms, medication, contraception, and sexually transmitted infection prevention measures.

“In recent years, the news has been filled with reporting on child sex abuse scandals, sexual harassment in the workplace, sexual assault on college campuses, and bullying of LGBTQ students and people of color,” said Senator Villivalam. “There is urgency to act now to ensure all students in Illinois receive the age appropriate education necessary to be safe and healthy. Senate Bill 2762 will do just that.”

continued →



REACH Act, continued

“Youth across Illinois, especially those in grades 6-12, want information about healthy relationships, abuse and violence prevention, and other critical issues they face in their daily lives,” stated Rep. Kathleen Willis. “When schools fail to offer this kind of education, their students are denied the opportunity to learn critical information to lead healthy, safe lives.”

Currently, 29 states mandate sex education, but Illinois is not one of them. The REACH Act requires personal health and safety instruction to address the experiences and needs of all youth in the school, including students with disabilities; to not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, nation origin, disability, religion, gender expression, gender identity, or sexual orientation; and to allow instructors to answer questions initiated by a student that are related to and consistent with the material of the course.

The REACH ACT is supported by AAUW Illinois, ALPHAS (African-American Lesbian Professionals Having A Say), ANA-Illinois, Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, Chicago Children’s Advocacy Center, Chicago Teachers Union, Comprehensive Sex Ed Now, Equality Illinois, Illinois Association of School Nurses, Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health, Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Illinois Public Health Association, Lambda Legal, National Association of Social Workers – Illinois Chapter, Peer Health Exchange, Peoria Proud, PFLAG Council of Northern Illinois, Phoenix Center, Prairie Pride Coalition, Rainbow Café, Resilience.

29 states mandate sex education, but Illinois is not one of them



'Trans-formal' education

by **Bob Chikos**



Bob Chikos teaches special education reading, math and pre-vocational classes at Crystal Lake Central High School in Crystal Lake, Illinois. He is a 2019-20 Teach Plus Illinois Policy Fellow and a member of PTI McHenry.

"The year started well, but substitute teachers were not told about Dave's name," my friend Pat told me. "My son was called a distinctly feminine name in a time and at a place where no one knew he was transgender. Without his consent. Without his permission. Without his control. He was outed. Everyone in that class knew. By lunch, the whisper network had grown."

Three months before this event, Dave had transferred to a new district; his former district did nothing about the LGBTQ bullying he had endured. In fact, when Dave reported the bullying to a staff member, the response was that Dave's gender identity—not the bullying—was the problem.

Dave's story is not unusual. Many transgender students around the country are unsupported in their schools. The statistics on the educational experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming students are alarming. According to the 2017 National School Climate Survey by GLSEN, more than 71 percent of LGBTQ students report hearing negative comments about gender expression from school staff. More than 40 percent of transgender and gender-nonconforming students are prevented from using their chosen name and pronoun or are forced to use a bathroom or locker room inconsistent with their gender. Many are disciplined for actions that would not have resulted in discipline for straight or cisgender students, such as wearing clothing based on their gender identity. Students victimized for being transgender or gender nonconforming are almost three times as likely to have missed a day of school over the past month, have a lower GPA, lower self-esteem and higher rates of depression.

[Click here to read the rest of the article in *Windy City Times*](#)

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News from PFLAG Rockford

by Phyllis Gallisath

We welcomed a few newcomers to our monthly meeting with 12 in attendance. After introductions, we had fun sharing the ways people can spread love, with examples like: through serving others, working directly with individuals, showing support and helping out when people are in need, practicing self love, promoting/sharing inspiring quotes online, serving on community organizations, hugs, random acts of kindness, being more empathetic, and by being yourself.

What We've Been up to:

PFLAG Rockford members, Scottie and Skye, spoke at the **Women's March Rockford** on Saturday, January 18, 2020.

The Liam Foundation rented an office at the Waterside Building in downtown Rockford. The next committee meeting for the public is Thursday, February 27th, 5:30p-7:30p at the new office! The office is located at 124 Water Street, in Office 303A. Some of The Liam Foundation's goals are to train folks how to be LGBTQ+ friendly and to gather and promote resources and organizations that are safe for LGBT folks (such as housing, food banks, etc.)

Although January's session of **DiversCITY** (our Queer Youth Group) was cancelled due to weather, two of the teen members met on January 22nd with Amber to work on the IYWT grant proposal for Queer Prom. This proposal was submitted on February 5th. We hope to hear that we've made it to the next level for an interview. DiversCITY youth picked this year's theme: "Living it Up in the GAYties," with an 80s flair! Our February 12th DiversCITY session was attended by four youth. We had a great time meeting therapy dog, Millie, who comforted the teens as we discussed topics. A new adult facilitator, Megan, led discussions on love, life, and finding one's chosen family. And we wrapped up the night with creative, stress-relieving throwback craft, Perler Beads!

PFLAG Rockford's Adult Peer Support Group also had to cancel in January due to weather. But we bounced right back in with our February 8th session. A group of six folks were led through discussions by a guest leader, Skye.

We have set up our website through the PFLAG IL Council's website. It redirects our domain pflagrockford.org to pflagillinois.org/rockford.

Open Floor for Discussion:

Teresa, from the Rockford Rescue Mission was present to promote their Back to Work program, which assists anyone from the community (it's open to the public!) in preparing resumes, mock interviewing, among other services. Please find more information

here: <https://www.rockfordrescuemission.org/what-we-do-2/works-center/>

A pastor from Emmanuel Lutheran Church visited to promote their church, services, and specifically wanted us to know that they are affirming of the LGBT+ community. We discussed the relationship between religion and LGBT+ folks.

A PFLAG Rockford Member shared a valuable message on our Facebook page that we would like to highlight in this month's meeting notes:

"The topic of transgender affirming care came up at today's meeting, and how there are so few places for it in the area and problems with wait lists, so I'd just like to raise more awareness about Planned Parenthood and the gender affirming care that they offer. They don't do this at every facility but there are two locations that I am aware of that offer these services in the Northern Illinois area - one is in Aurora and the other is in Ottawa. They are both in a similar proximity to Howard Brown in Chicago. They're definitely not as specialized as Howard Brown, but they do a great job providing inclusive care and treatment for the LGBTQ+ community, and I would definitely recommend them as an alternative. Pros: Not having to deal with Chicago traffic, wait-list for an appointment under a month (generally 10-20



days), safe space, informed consent treatment approach, very affirming and inclusive, sliding scale, quality healthcare. Cons: Less specialized, from what I've heard they're fairly bureaucratic and strict with their treatment plan, opting to do things more so by the books (reluctant or less likely to consider different medicine alternatives).”

[Editor: Planned Parenthood - Rogers Park Health Center at 5725 N Broadway, Chicago also provides excellent transgender affirming care. There are more locations in Illinois – please check with centers close to you about their services.]

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/get-care/our-services/lgbt-services>

Have a great one,

Your PFLAG Rockford Team:

- Founder and President, Phyllis Gallisath
- Treasurer, Curt McKay
- Secretary, Amber Kresol
- And our amazing members and volunteers

News from PFLAG Aurora / Fox Valley

by Tom Purl

During the February 9th meeting we were privileged with a large group, including two nursing students who wanted to learn more about caring for LGBTQ+ patients. We discussed topics such as mis-gendering, when to share private information with parents, and resources for children who have trouble talking to their parents.

We also discussed how the first Outwards event is Tues, March 10 at 7 pm at Dry City Brew Works in Wheaton. Outwards is aiming to be similar to Chicago's Outspoken events but local to the Western suburbs. It is suggested that you get there early to either eat or at least get a seat.

News from PFLAG DuPage

by Margaret Donahue

PFLAG Dupage has had a busy start to the new decade! The outreach and educational activities in the western suburbs increase each month.

Starting off the month, co-presidents Kristin Shulman and Margaret Donahue hosted a table at a health fair at Kennedy Junior High in Naperville. We were pleasantly surprised that so many attendees were willing to engage with us. We had a table of PFLAG information with our usual stash of buttons that seemed to be great conversation starters. One Mom admitted that “all of this is new to me” as she gathered up our resource page. A student introduced herself chatted a bit and then revealed quite confidently that she was bisexual. The event was only about an hour but revealed that this age group is definitely in need of resources that PFLAG can provide to them and their parents. An added bonus is that a open house attendee agreed to speak at one of our meetings about her experiences with her trans child.

On Saturday February 8, we had a couple of events to cover. We are so fortunate to have the space at St. Pauls Lutheran Church in Wheaton. The congregation was hosting a reception for an associate pastor candidate and it was great to stop in and express our gratitude in person for the space available to our chapter.

That evening we hosted our traditional winter movie night. Soup, bread and dessert were enjoyed by all while we watched Call the Midwife Season 8 , Episode 5. The topic was intersex. As a follow up to the PBS episode set in the 1960's, we played a YouTube from a presenter at PFLAG National. The Tedx was titled Born Intersex: we are human! By Mx Anunnaki Ray Marquez. Lots of discussion on these short films filled the evening.

Valentine's weekend was another busy one for PFLAG Dupage. On Sunday February 16 we had our monthly meeting. We had five more presentations from PFLAG National participants. We had four brand new attendees. Two of the new folks met our group on February 14 at *The Cake* ; a production by the Buffalo Theater Ensemble at the MAC in Glen Ellyn. The Buffalo Theater Ensemble is offering discounted tickets to this producton with the code PFLAG thru March 1.



News from PFLAG McHenry

by Toni Weaver

Attorney Beth Vonau was our February presenter. She had attended PFLAG's breakout session at the annual People in Need Forum and explained to us that she had witnessed deliberate mis-gendering in the courtroom and wanted to increase her understanding of the issues surrounding transgender and gender non-conforming people so that she could be a better advocate and, if she wins election to the circuit court, a better leader in the courtroom.

Beth told us about the continuing education that judges are required to undertake, and she proposed that PFLAG could approach the Illinois court system to suggest that training in transgender be included in the twice-yearly training days. The pertinent website is www.illinoiscourts.gov, and one should look for "Judicial Education in Illinois" and "Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts – Judicial Education Division." This might be something to bring to the attention of Equality Illinois as well.

After helping coordinate a workshop for mental health professionals in early February, we have a breather until April when we'll be staffing a table at Harvard's first ever "Parent University."

Please help spread the word about Gateway Foundation's "Out in Recovery" program designed for LGBTQ+ people dealing with substance abuse and addiction. **The 24 hour helpline is 866-505-OUT2(6882)**, and they may also be found at www.GateFoundation.org. For more information about the program, contact Amy P. Smith, Regional Business Development Coordinator (apsmith@gatewayfoundation.org).



News from PFLAG Deerfield

by Sue Ginsburg

We were honored to welcome one of our own this month. Alisa Kober researched and made a power point presentation packed with valuable information about the "B" in LGBT. For quite some time, the subject of bisexuality has not been addressed. As a matter of fact, the bisexual community has felt discriminated against by their own community! While the old definition of is that bisexuals are attracted to men and women, today, the realization is that we know that there are more than just two genders. Alisa provided definitions that better describe bisexuals:

1. Those who are attracted to genders like and different from one's own
2. Anyone who is attracted romantically and/or sexually to more than one gender
3. The potential to be attracted to people of more than one sex or gender, not necessarily at the same time

Surprisingly, 52% of LGBT people are bisexual; but only 1/3 of bisexuals are "out".

Science cannot pigeonhole anyone's sexuality. One's sexuality may fluctuate, but all are normal, even if not the norm. Attraction orientation may change. There seems to be so many MYTHS and assumptions surrounding bisexuality:

- 38% of Americans believe there is no "middle ground"
- 46% believe sexuality is on a scale
- 16% aren't sure
- Bisexuality is a "confused" stage
- Eventually bisexuals choose a side
- Bi guys are just gay
- Bi girls are fetishized; words used to describe them are derogatory.

BI MYTHS

Because bisexuality is so difficult to understand for so many, it brings about insecurity amongst the population. They often feel unwelcome amongst the lesbian and gay community. There are higher rates of unemployment and poverty for bisexuals. There is more depression and anxiety; finding other bi's is difficult. So how can we be supportive? We can acknowledge a bi person's sexuality, increase visibility and fight stereotypes. Remember that September 23 is Bi-Day!!! By the end of Alisa's presentation we all felt better educated and informed.

News from PFLAG Ottawa

by Ken Brown

At our January meeting, our guest speaker was Melissa Engel. Melissa is the Director of Counseling and Prevention Programming at **Safe Journeys**. Safe Journeys offers a safe atmosphere where survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence can find support, resources, and strength. Counselors and advocates at outreach locations in Ottawa, Streator, Pontiac, and Ogelsby provide these supportive services. Among other things, Safe Journeys provides an emergency shelter, court advocacy, a 24-hour crisis line, supportive counseling, and prevention education. Melissa spoke of all these things, including supportive services for LGBTQ persons, and engaged us in thoughtful discussion.

In February, we plan to celebrate Black History Month by discussing the contributions of African-American LGBTQ folks to our society. We will also watch a few short videos from the HRC that celebrate such contributions.

In March, our guest speaker will be Len Meyer, the downstate Community Engagement Manager for Planned Parenthood. Len founded the Central Illinois Pride Health Center, and has been honored by the Multicultural Leadership Program for their LGBTQI advocacy and community leadership. Len is open about their transgender status and is willing to share their story to help others gain understanding. With Planned Parenthood, Len works to make sure LGBTQI people receive quality and respectful healthcare.

In April, PFLAG Ottawa will help sponsor the appearance of “The Many” at Open Table Church in Ottawa. The Many is an uncommon, intentionally diverse collective making music for people to sing together about peace and justice and a world where we all belong. Based in Chicago, The Many performs music of resistance to hatred and division, for reconciliation and restoration, and for honest expressions of peace-making, economic and racial justice, and LGBTQ+ inclusion. The performance will take place at 7:00 pm on Friday, April 3, at Open Table UCC, 910 Columbus Street in Ottawa.

News from PFLAG Hinsdale

by Barb Medley

Our speakers for February were Mona Noriega, the Commissioner on Human Relations in Chicago and Mike Ziri, Director of Public Policy for Equality Illinois. Mona spoke about civil rights protections offered by the City of Chicago. Civil rights protections are offered to anyone who experiences discrimination in the City, even non-residents. Protections on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity include public accommodations (churches are excepted), housing and employment. They include, for example, lease terms in housing, and in employment things like credit history or “check the box” questions on an employment application like, “do you have a record,” or “have you ever been arrested”.

They are advocates for the victims of hate crimes and receive 300 complaints per year. They welcome opportunities to educate – in schools, in businesses and to community groups. The City has offered protections since 1988.

Mike then spoke about the state protections in place through the Illinois Human Rights Act, which went into effect in 2005. The Illinois Department of Human Rights investigates complaints and the Illinois Human Rights Commission adjudicates.

Illinois is also one of five states that have an inclusive curriculum law, requiring education of LGBTQ history. Other recently passed laws in effect as of January 1st or effective July 1st include: equitable bathroom access - single occupancy bathrooms must be gender neutral; gender markers on drivers licenses - a physician's note is no longer needed; employment rights for any business with more than one employee; and diagnosis and treatment for ages 12 and over without parental consent for STIs, the HPV vaccine and HIV testing, services and counseling.

Chicago and Illinois are progressive in this regard. The states that surround Illinois do not offer these protections.

Our March speaker is Victor Salvo, the Executive Director of the Legacy Project, a Chicago-based non-profit whose mission is to inform and inspire an appreciation for the role LGBTQ people have played in advancing world history, science and culture.



News from PTI Chicago

by **Bill Guilfoile**, he/him/his pronouns

PTI Chicago had their monthly meeting on February 13, 2020 at Center on Halsted in Chicago.

They had a speaker John Guilfoile (they/them) who is a Licensed Social Worker working for the pediatric group practice Individual and Family Connection (IFC). John is the child of Bill and Betty Guilfoile who are members of PTI Chicago. John shared their story with the group and then discussed what IFC does and how they can provide assistance to LGBTQ+ community.

John has lifelong experience with TGNC identities as they also identify as Trans and Gender Non-Conforming. John has 6 years of experience working with kids and teenagers in a therapeutic setting. They are passionate about working with TGNC kids and teenagers and wholeheartedly understand that navigating the current world in a TGNC body can be disheartening and challenging. John hopes to continue helping TGNC kids/teens and their families grow together by providing the necessary support for living a healthy life.

Individual and Family Connection (IFC) is an independent pediatric therapy practice located in the heart of Chicago. IFC's therapists dedicate their careers to helping children, ages 18 months through young adulthood, effectively navigate the challenges before them. These may include a bully on the playground, self-esteem issues, peer relationships, a traumatic event, family transition (such as divorce or new sibling), and domestic

violence. IFC also helps children experiencing grief, eating disorders, attachment issues, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, gender dysphoria/identity issues, and anxiety.

Each child is unique. IFC clinicians believe there isn't a one size fits all solution for the children they see in practice. By offering a unique approach called Through the Eyes of a ChildSM, IFC clinicians become part of a child's world, working with parents, teachers, coaches, and other persons of influence in your child's life. This allows clinicians to deepen their understanding of your child's challenges, and create an effective, customized treatment plan that works in a compassionate and timely manner.

Individual and Family Connection (IFC)

2865 N Clybourn, Ground Floor

Chicago IL 60618

www.ifccounseling.com

John@ifccounseling.com

+1 773.270.0469



At the end of January, PFLAG Deerfield was shocked and deeply saddened by the sudden loss of our member Carole Beth Abrams. Carole was such an important member of our chapter for so many reasons. She was our first trans member, having moved from being the Palatine chapter president when that chapter dissolved. Carole was always more than willing to share her story, providing support, understanding and wisdom to parents who attended not knowing what to do. Her wry sense of humor made everyone laugh, yet her power to touch on the most important aspects of our mission, always came to the forefront of her interactions. Carole was always a positive force and a devoted advocate, volunteering to attend events where PFLAG's presence was needed.

Carole worked for the IRS for over four decades! She lobbied in Springfield to seek equal rights for the transgender community. She always struggled with her health, having been born with a heart defect and going through many heart surgeries as a child and as an adult. Carole was a most kind, loving and giving person. Her expertise and care for others will be sorely missed.

Donations can be made in her memory to:

Adult Congenital Heart Association
280 N. Providence Rd., Suite 6
Media, Pennsylvania 19063

or PFLAG Council of Northern Illinois
P.O. Box 734
Elmhurst, IL 60126



PFLAG National Convention 2019

Kansas City, Missouri

by Bernadette and Ron Whitfield PFLAG DuPage

Our overall impression in one word: **empowerment!**

We were urged to strive for a renewed passion to change our corner of the world. So, “Stand up, be visible, show up, and speak out!”

Be fierce because people’s lives are on the line.

Advocate by telling your story.

There are no voices more powerful than those of loving parents, friends, and allies. We must engage in the conversations. Brian Bond, PFLAG National Executive Director who worked in the Obama White House, said “Where’s the rage?!”

We have to do something. These individuals are our family. Hate is out there. PFLAG is about love, acceptance, and fierce advocates for all that is good.

Talk about impactful people — There are hundreds of them who made you feel better after having interacted with them.

There was an overall feeling of joy, love, respect, and gratefulness to be there.

The 2019 PFLAG National Convention (October 25-27 in Kansas City, MO) was an exciting event. Almost every Chapter in the U.S. was represented. Ten members from PFLAG DuPage attended. The scope of the meeting was enormous. There were 6 “time periods” and 10 concurrent sessions for all but one of the 60 possible meeting times. The topics covered a very wide range of issues relevant to PFLAG. Workshops were scheduled during the 59 “assigned” time periods.

Between the 2 of us, we attended 8 workshops:

Difficult Conversations — Tackling the Hot Topics without Getting Heated! The presenter was Brian Vega.

Effectively Sharing Your Story to Transform Hearts and Minds — The presenter was Jamie Henkel

The Parent Journey: Raising Queer Kiddos in a Straight World — The presenter was Jen O’Ryan, Ph.D.

What Keeps Me Up at Night — Parents of Gender Expansive Kids

Public Activism: Ways to Advocate in Support of Trans Youth

Family Acceptance within Families of Color — Many presenters!

Publishing an Engaging PFLAG Newsletter — The presenter was Andrew Zanevsky

Born Intersex: We are Human! The Importance of Inclusion — The presenters were Anunnaki Ray Marquez and James Garland Bunce

We will say more about the presentations by Andrew, Anunnaki and James, and Brian Vega. But first, we would like to say that an invaluable feature of the conventions was the opportunity to meet and enjoy conversations with PFLAGers from around the country.

Very memorable was a discussion in the lounge area with Alberto Oliver of PFLAG New Orleans. We learned that PFLAG New Orleans has a “satellite” structure. They have a meeting almost every week — in geographically distant locations in the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area to accommodate the needs of their widely-scattered membership. We shared information with Alberto about button making (where to buy) and button designs.

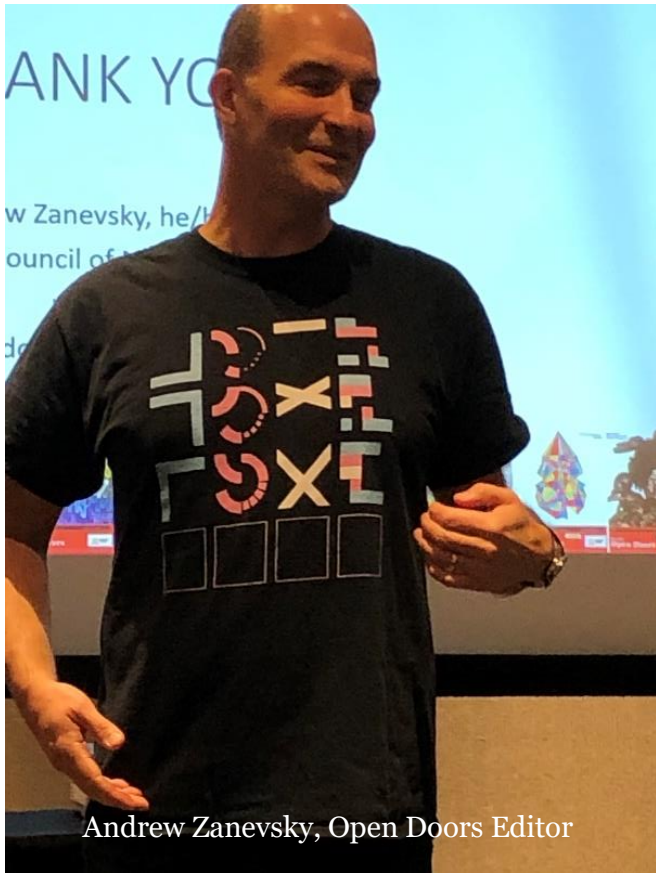
Most memorable was the relationship we developed with Brian Bond. Knowing that he worked in the Obama White House, we asked if he knew our recently-deceased friend Mike Bauer (Mayor Lightfoot’s campaign manager and a speaker at many Council Chapters). He said that he knew Mike well and was saddened by his death. We shared photos and videos of Mike during the course of several e-mail exchanges, for which Brian expressed thanks.



Brian Bond with Rep. Susan Ruiz (KS-23)



On to Andrew! His presentation was well attended and well received. He displayed highlights of many issues of *Open Doors*. It was clear to all that this is no ordinary newsletter. It is of magazine quality. It was inspiring.



Andrew Zanevsky, Open Doors Editor

Eye opening was the session on intersex. Anunnaki (assigned female at birth) and James have been married for more than 30 years. In the early years, they presented as an ordinary heterosexual couple. They have 2 “natural” children and 1 adopted child. Anunnaki, born intersex, has had dozens of surgeries — some to “undo” the damages of earlier surgeries. He was suicidal and nearly died several times. He was so damaged by surgery, medications, and other therapies that he was confined to a wheelchair for extended periods of time. Fortunately for James and Anunnaki, they found a doctor in Florida who saved Anunnaki’s life. Today he is enjoying a healthy, happy, vibrant, and productive life.

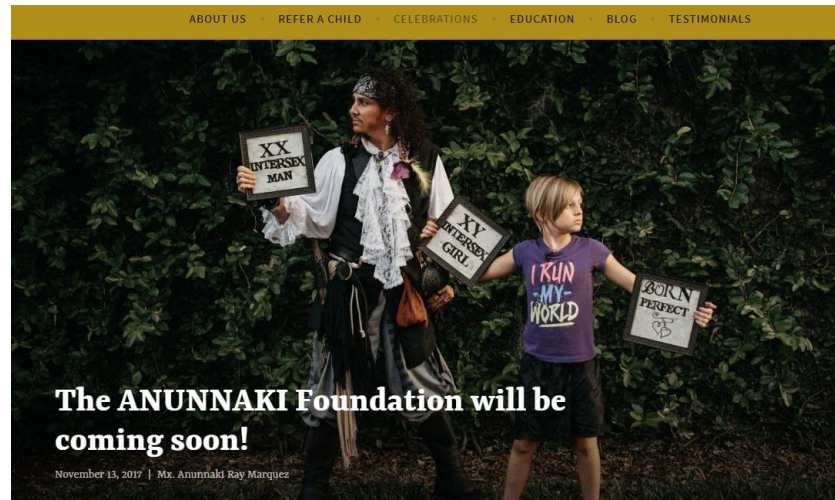
Their presentation began with a “clinical” discussion of what it means to be intersex. It is way too complicated to describe here. A good place to start learning about intersex is at <https://theanunnakifoundation.org/>, which John and Anunnaki founded. Prominent there is an amazing and moving Ted Talk by Anunnaki. Their foundation and their work aim to give a voice for intersex children whose voices have been taken through violations by non-consenting surgeries and

celebrates self-determination with their families. They believe that the self-determination of gender identity is every human being’s human right and it is their passion to educate this world.

For a moving poem by Anunnaki and resources on intersex see

<https://anunnakiray.com/2020/01/01/poem-here-we-go-again-in-2020/> and

<https://anunnakiray.com/about/>.



Pirate Antonio Phoenix (Anunnaki) meets Joey for Intersex Awareness Day 2017. (Photography: Karmathartic, Seth Langner)

The session presenter for *Difficult Conversations — Tackling the Hot Topics without Getting Heated!* was Brian Vega. He had many helpful tips. He began by saying that we must prepare ourselves before engaging in a difficult conversation. It is important to start by defining ourselves: Why us? Why now? We need to understand ourselves to better understand our audience. We need to remember that we have been on a journey ourselves and we have the lived experience. We must trust ourselves by owning our story and loving ourselves through the process. Understanding our implicit biases and understanding our stories are important components to examine within ourselves.

Avoid emotion, negativity, and fears within the conversation because no learning takes place if it’s all emotional. Create pause time and recognize that people need time to reflect and ponder what they are hopefully digesting.

Lastly, let the data lead the discussion. The data support the proof. Trust the process. Realize that it will take more than one conversation. Keep on planting seeds. Be congruent. Be transparent. Be ourselves!

Advocate by telling your story



More from the 2019 National PFLAG Convention – Conversion Therapy

by Kristin Shulman

The 2019 National PFLAG Convention is now a few months behind us but it is still resonating with me. Besides the plenary sessions, I attended five separate break-out sessions (the maximum available) each offering something different to think about. One of the sessions I attended was particularly impactful.

Joel Barrett of Joel Speaks Out presented “Ex-Gay...Still Gay? Understanding Conversion Therapy and Proposed Legislation.” Joel described his life and experiences in detail including trolling for sex with unknown men while still married to his wife. His whole story, up to a point, was of a life that was deeply hidden while trying to project the life he felt was expected of him. Eventually, as an adult in his thirties, Joel spent three years in conversion therapy with the now defunct, Exodus International. While Joel said some of their basic counseling was good, as you can guess, praying away the gay did not work. Joel realized just how much it does not work when he asked to speak to someone who was a success story from the program and his request was refused. He was told that speaking about being previously gay could stir up feelings for that person and have them revert to their gay ways. Right then and there, Joel realized how harmful all of this is and decided to live his true life. Now, Joel has been married for over a decade and is out speaking the truth. You can see an uplifting shorter version of Joel’s story, Life’s a Banquet, by going to this link <https://youtu.be/m1ydJEH3jCM>

Conversion therapy laws prohibit licensed mental health practitioners from subjecting LGBTQ minors to harmful "conversion therapy" practices that attempt to change their sexual orientation or gender identity. These laws do not restrict the practice among religious providers or specifically prohibit conversion therapy for adults. Joel, who was a pastor and felt so broken, did not seek “help” for his gayness until he was an adult. Joel pointed out that many organizations that practice conversion therapy use other names like

sexual healing and biblical counseling. Thirty one states and four U.S. territories do not have laws to protect minors and in all states, adults can be harmed by these so called counseling programs. Only filing consumer fraud complaints against individual therapists can stop them. Joel also pointed out that The Southern Poverty Law Center keeps track of these complaints.

Finally, and what really disturbed me as a long standing member of PFLAG, is Joel’s words regarding the proliferation of groups that pretend to be allies and in particular a group called PFOX, Parent and Friend of Ex Gays. This group is using our good name to promote conversion therapy. A look at their website confirms that they are trying to confuse people about their group. Taken directly from their website “PFOX exists to educate, support, and advocate for individuals and parents on the issue of same-sex attraction, and increase others’ understanding and acceptance of the ex-gay community.” They’re taking our words and twisting them to fit their agenda. We need to stay vigilant and call out these groups that are attempting to harm our families and friends.

Learning more about the issues that matter the most to us is a great reason to attend a PFLAG conference, national or local. If you can swing it, don’t miss the conferences!

LINKS:

Blog by Taryn de Vere [***Trans Children Are a Gift, Not a Loss***](#)

[***Booklist***](#) (PDF file) prepared by Fortunate Families, an organization that ministers to Catholic LGBTQ+ people and their families.

Book [***The Savvy Ally: A Guide for Becoming a Skilled LGBTQ+ Advocate***](#) by Jeannie Gainsburg. A free handout based on the book is available [***here***](#) (PDF file).





Photo by Tamara Hijazi

SAM KIRK

Managed by:

NiMi Agency
Michelle Collins, Nic Gomez
hello@anonagency.com
nic@nicsix.com

IG: [@IamSamKirk](https://www.instagram.com/IamSamKirk)

FB: [Sam Kirk](https://www.facebook.com/SamKirk)

Website: iamsamkirk.com

Find Sam's art on
Instagram, Facebook,
and her website

About the Artist

Sam Kirk is a multidisciplinary artist, who explores culture and identity politics through her creations. Her artwork focuses on a variety of intersections which encompass a call to celebrate differences and enact change. Her paintings include vivid powerful images of women, members of the LGBTQIA community, and those who have historically been underrepresented. Her work celebrates these people and the journeys that have made them who they are.

Throughout her childhood, her family's frequent moves to a variety of Chicago neighborhoods sparked her fascination with the nuances of the human experience. It was during these moments where she found herself discovering the cultures of the city and sorting through her own identity as a bi-racial, queer woman. Kirk's artwork, much like her life has been an on-going narrative about how life's experiences impact our identity. Her vibrant color palette, intricate line-work and layered backgrounds highlight cultural communities via multi-toned figures recalled from memories of her travels throughout the world. Kirk's public murals often address social issues, as she intentionally uses the public space to spark dialogue around topics of equality and visibility for women, communities of color, and the LGBTQIA community.

She has been recognized for her public art career, which focuses on highlighting women, underrepresented communities, and the LGBTQIA community. She recently completed her first international mural in Casablanca, Morocco. A commission by World Business Chicago and the City of Casablanca, Kirk created the "Sister Cities" mural as a celebration of 35 years of programming between Chicago and Casablanca. She is the first woman and American to participate in their Annual CASAMOUJA Street Art Festival. While Kirk has maintained a successful public art career, she has also exhibited throughout the US in galleries and museums. Her artwork is in several notable collections, with a recent piece about transgender identity added to the permanent collection of the National Museum of Mexican Art.





Interview

Open Doors: Growing up on the south side of Chicago, at what age did you first want to paint over some of the building walls in your neighborhood?

Sam Kirk: I grew up admiring graffiti. I loved seeing the tags and characters throughout the neighborhoods, but I didn't have the desire to paint murals until my late 20s. When I began my art career, I was exhibiting in galleries. The response was great, but the audience was not entirely who I was hoping for. I was missing many of the people from my neighborhood and others like mine. I was curious to hear their thoughts on my work, especially since the content was about/for them. Since they didn't frequent galleries too often, I decided to bring the work to them. Painting in the public space allows for the engagement and conversations I was hoping for.

OD: When you paint murals or other large-scale work, how much of your vision comes from planning it and drawing small scale sketches and how much is improvised on location, when you see how it interacts with other elements of architecture and landscape?

SK: Majority of my public murals are planned in advance. A full color concept is developed prior to painting the mural often to present to the property owner or the client.

OD: Your art has a social mission. Please tell our readers about themes that you consider most important.

SK: My work is a celebration of culture and identity. I feel the narratives within my work are most important, as they include moments of impact: coming out stories, transitions, feeling complete. While my work addresses many of the obstacles that happen during the process of some of these moments (I.e. homelessness) the ultimate goal is to recognize what feeling proud to be oneself looks like/is.

Interview (continued)

OD: What gives you strength as an artist and as a person?

SK: I grew up watching my family, friends, and community members work hard. Many of these people had/have nothing to fall back on and every day they put their all in at jobs they'd rather not do.

OD: What are your passions besides art?

SK: I love traveling and discovering new cities, countries and cultures. Everything from exploring a new language to eating foods I've never had before, I love it all. If I could learn a new dance or art skill in my travels, even better.

OD: What message would you send to young aspiring artists?

SK: Make your own rules and don't get in your own way. The process can be ugly, be ok with that, embrace it a little. Listen to your fans and practice your craft daily.

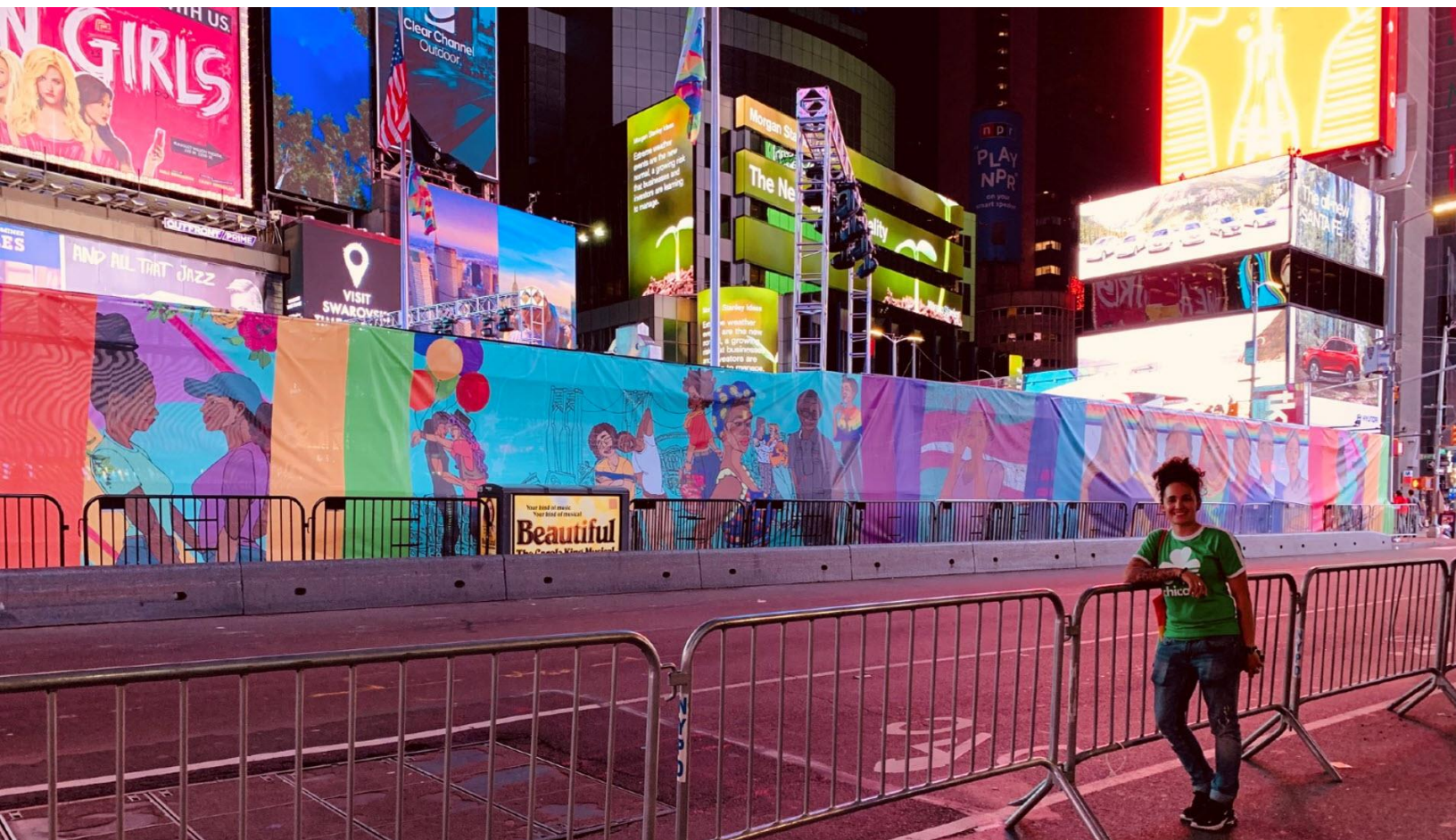
“the ultimate goal is to recognize what feeling proud to be oneself looks like/is”

← ↓ From the “World Pride” installation, Times Square Manhattan, New York, June 2019





↑ **“Bold, Brilliant, Beautiful Brooklyn”** by Sam Kirk & Jenny Q., 2017



“World Pride” Times Square Main Stage Installation, 0020 Manhattan, New York - June 2019

Sam’s artwork was selected by Heritage Pride NYC to wrap around the entire block of the main stage in Times Square where the World Pride Closing Ceremony was held.



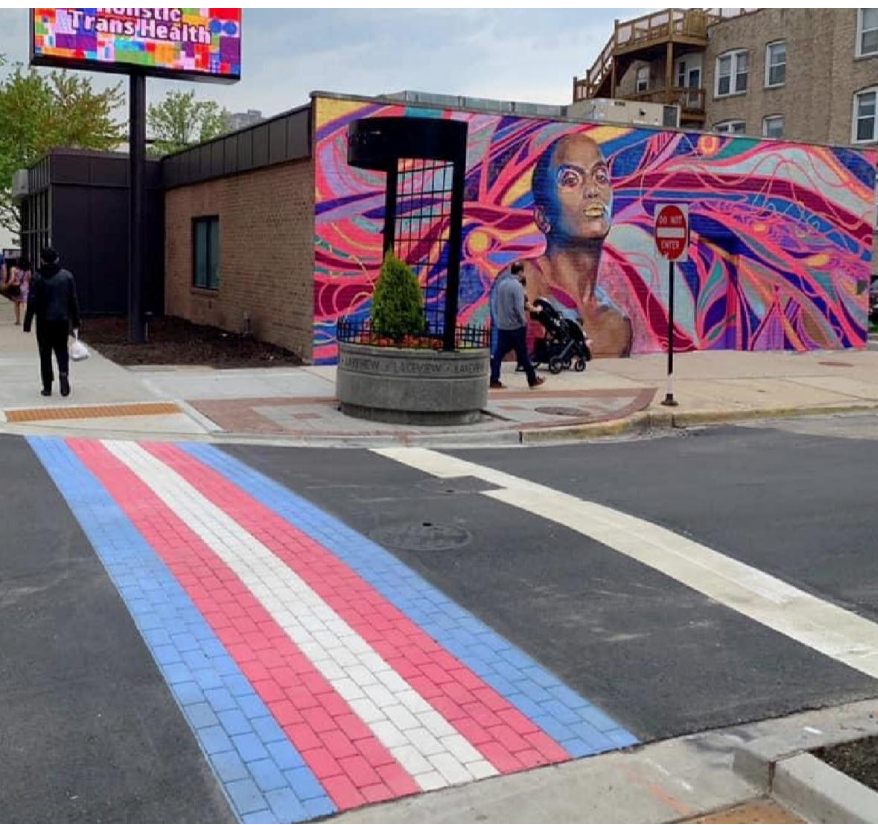


↑ To wrap up the summer 2019, Sam Kirk and team hosted an evening at Dumbo House where guests could watch her paint live and get to know a little more about Brooklyn Community Pride Center. The triptych created was put up for auction to support the Brooklyn Community Pride Center. Each panel represents the individualistic expression, style and creativity seen throughout Brooklyn.



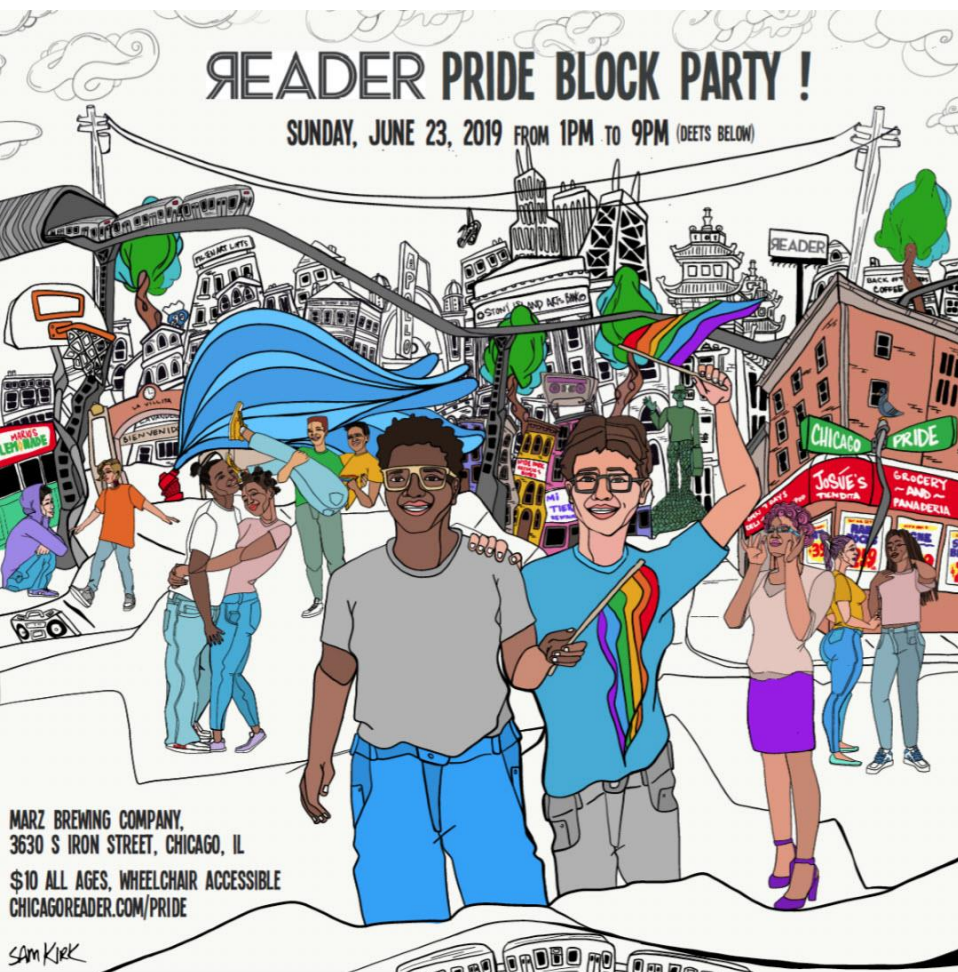
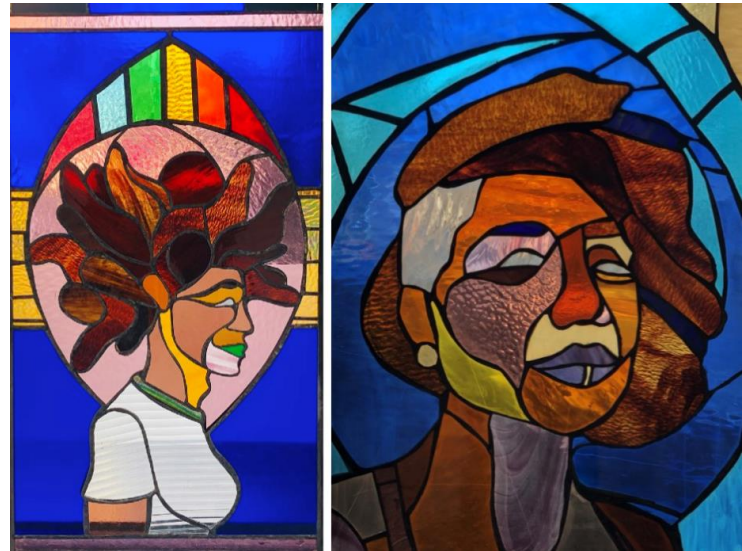
← "A Tribute to Victoria Cruz" Manhattan, NY, June 2019

A commission by the Lisa Project x Heritage Pride, Sam Kirk was selected as one of 50 national and international artists to paint a mural in New York City to celebrate World Pride 2019 and 50 years since Stonewall. Her mural in The Lower East Side (below) pays tribute to Victoria Cruz, a Puerto Rican Transgender Woman, Activist, and Community Organizer who has continued to help the LGBTQ+ community in New York since the Stonewall Riots.



← A Transgender Pride Flag at Halsted and Melrose in front of a mural created by Sam Kirk, Andy Bellomo, and Sandra Antongiorgi as part of the 14 Chicago Rainbow Pride Crosswalk installation. 2019.

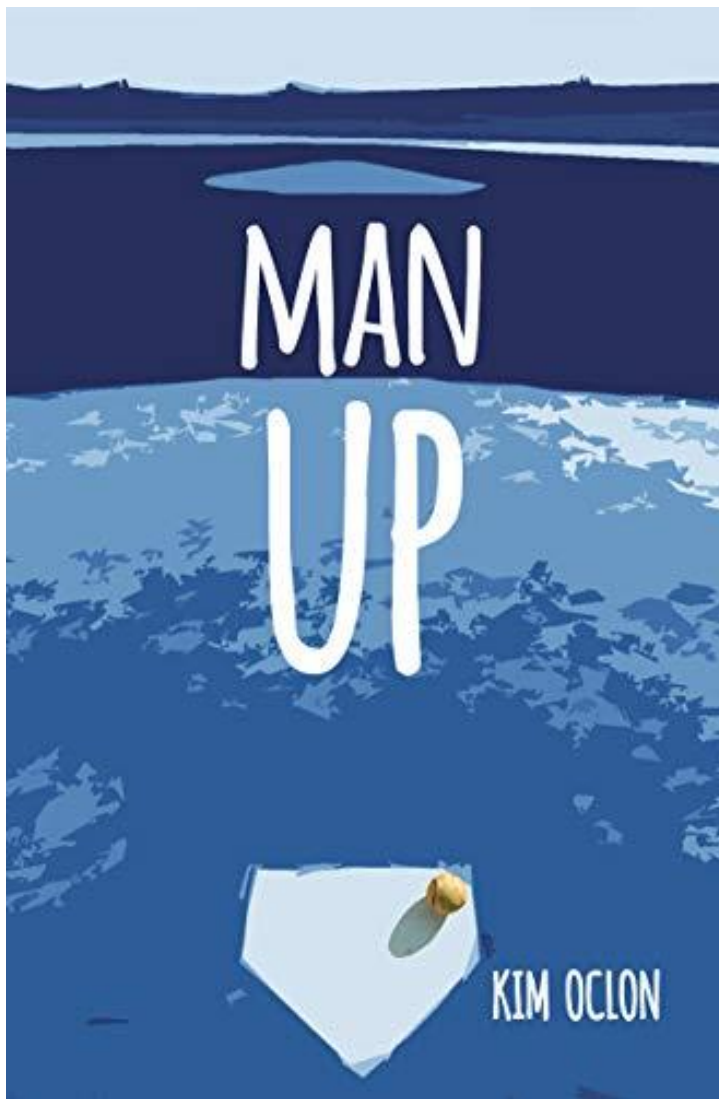
↓ The Alchemy of Us, A Journey of Identity. Part I.



Chicago Reader Pride Block Party, June 2019 Limited Edition Artwork for Promotional Materials and Gay IPA Beer

A collaboration with the Chicago Reader to celebrate 50 years of LGBTQ+ community legacy at an all-day, all-ages block party. Proceeds of the day's sales were donated to several Illinois LGBTQ non-profit organizations.





Man Up is the debut Young Adult novel by Kim Oclon, a member of the PFLAG Grayslake/Round Lake chapter. It is scheduled to be released on April 22 and is now available for pre-order on Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Man-Up-Kim-Oclon/dp/0999388630> Publisher: Trism Books

Man Up is about David, a baseball player with a (secret) track-star boyfriend. After keeping his sexuality a secret for so long, he learns about allies in the school and the various types of support others need.

The next issue of Open Doors will feature an interview with Kim Oclon. Here, we present an excerpt from the novel shared by the author.

From *Man Up* by Kim Oclon

I always thought it was weird to see Coach during the school day because he wore dress pants and a button-up shirt, as opposed to the T-shirts and sweats during practice. “I got a pass from you.” I held up the little piece of paper.

“Yes, I know.” Coach always seemed uncomfortable in his “Assistant Athletic Director” clothes. He undid the top button of his shirt as if it were strangling him. He tried to pull up his sleeves but must have forgotten that they were buttoned at the cuff. “Umm, come in. Come in.”

Coach Kelly ushered me into his office and made sure to close the door behind him before striding slowly to his desk. Since his belly was on the large side, he couldn’t push his chair in all the way. Many of the guys on the team ribbed him about it sometimes, asking him about his due date, and he always took it well, saying how he’d name the baby after anyone who hit for the cycle.

That Coach Kelly was not the Coach Kelly sitting before me. The one who just folded his hands and strained a smile. “I see you’ve been putting in some time in the weight room for the preseason conditioning. Glad someone is taking advantage of this time.”

“Yeah. Mike’s been there too.” I wished he would just say that I didn’t have a future so I could go back to playing with the cars in physics.

“Good.” Coach nodded. “He’s going to do great things this season.”

“Is something the matter, Coach? Is everything okay?” I figured I could be the one to move the conversation along, letting Coach know it was okay to just say it.

Coach rested his hands on his belly and moved them around in order to find a comfortable place. If Mike were there, he would have whispered to me that Coach was trying to feel the baby kick. “Me? I’m fine. I’m doing fine.” The nodding turned into a slight rocking. “How are you?”

“Uh, I’m doing pretty good. Excited for the season.” Actually, I felt like I was either going to throw up or cry. I’d end up embarrassed either way.

“Good, good.” Coach continued to rock as I squirmed in a brown plastic chair. It would have been impossible to get comfortable in it regardless of the conversation.

Continued →

I couldn't breathe. It felt like someone punched me in the chest. Was I having a heart attack? Did kids my age have heart attacks?

Man Up, continued

Behind Coach Kelly's desk hung a series of photos of all the baseball teams he had coached during his time at Lincoln. The most recent two photos featured me front and center. I hit my growth spurt later than the rest of the guys and was a little on the short side, so I had to sit or kneel in the front row of team photos. In Little League photos, Mike often posed in the front with me, each of us holding a bat or a glove and ball. By high school, Mike moved on to one of the middle rows.

"David, I have to talk to you about something."

This was it. No college. Dreams shattered. Was it too late to start researching other options? A lot of people hadn't made a final decision yet, right? "I know, Coach. I-"

"Now, I am not sure how to bring this up." Coach tried to shift in his chair but got stuck by the armrests on either side of him. "You got a big season coming up and I know how much you need to focus on that."

Big season? Maybe my last season. "Yeah. I'm waiting to hear-"

"What I'm trying to say is," Coach plowed on, "there's no easy way to say this."

If Coach would just shut up for a fucking second I could tell him to save his breath. "You don't have to," I tried to cut in. "I'll just-"

"So, I'm just going to say it."

"No need, Coach. College-"

"David," Coach sucked in a breath through his teeth, "are you a homosexual?"

Wait. What?

I couldn't breathe. It felt like someone punched me in the chest. Was I having a heart attack? Did kids my age have heart attacks?

Tension didn't spread from my shoulders, it instantly consumed my whole body and twisted every muscle. "What?" I had heard the question and didn't need a repeat but I asked anyway.

"I didn't want to ask, and I wouldn't have." Coach Kelly shifted again in his chair, not finding any spare room. "But I've been getting these calls from some parents who don't want their kids to play ball with a queer."

I winced when Coach said that word. It sounded different when he said it.

Pride Films & Plays

by David Zak
Executive Director
pridefilmsandplays.com
866 811 4111.

PRIDE



Another new show opens at PRIDE ARTS! **Dex & Abby** is a charming piece about two dogs - and the men who love them. It is a lot of fun, and very moving. Please join us for a performance during previews - Friday, February 21 and Saturday, February 22 at 8:00 and February 23 at 2:30, or Monday, February 24 - the press opening - at 8:00. RSVP to pfptickets@gmail.com to let us know when you would like to attend and how many tickets you need.





Tuesday, Mar. 10 3 - 5 pm

Dialectical Behavior Therapy For Survivors of Domestic Violence

A group for individuals who have experienced violence and have difficulty managing intense emotions and engaging in successful relationships.

Please call 773-871-CARE (2273) or email avp@centeronhalsted.org for a brief intake.

Center on Halsted | 3656 N. Halsted

[LEARN MORE >](#)



Thursday, March 12 6 - 8 pm

Conversations...

Gender + Sexuality at Home and at Work

Join us as we collaborate with WE Events to discuss the experiences of LGBTQ+ families and community members and talk about how we can demystify gender & sexuality.

citygirl@Work | 639 W. Diversey Parkway

[RSVP HERE >](#)



Saturday, March 14 9:30 - 11:30 am

LGBTQ Family Playdate 2nd Saturdays of the Month

Calling all LGBTQ families! Bring your children (1 - 8 years of age) for a fun, engaging Saturday morning play date. This event will take place on 2nd Saturdays of the month from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. on the third floor pre-function area.

Center on Halsted | 3656 N. Halsted

[RSVP HERE >](#)



Sign up to be a part of The Real Million Coalition of organizations and individuals. It was created to oppose the hate group that calls itself the “One Million Moms” and spreads anti-LGBTQ messages through their network of radio stations and the Internet. The “One Million Moms”, despite their misleading name, is actually a small group of activists associated with the hate group the American Family Association. They use bullying tactics in digital campaigns and the press to scare not only our families but also corporations, media companies, and others who are working to be inclusive of our LGBTQIA2S+ loved ones.

Click [here](#) to sign up and stand up to hate. Follow on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#).



<https://genderjourneymidatlantic.org/>

Professional Day: Friday, October 2
Family Day: Saturday, October 3
Registration opens March 9



PFLAG Northern Illinois Chapters

PFLAG McHenry
Meetings held 2nd Tuesday – 7 pm
Tree of Life Unitarian Church
5603 W Bull Valley Rd
McHenry 60050
pflagmchenry@pflagillinois.org

Parents of Transgender (McHenry)
Meetings are held the 4th Wednesday – 7 p.m.
Tree of Life Unitarian Church
5603 W Bull Valley Rd, McHenry 60050
pflagptimchenry@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Grayslake/Round Lake
Meetings held the 2nd Wednesday – 6:30 p.m.
Star Homes
783 Barron Blvd.
Grayslake, IL 60030
pflaggrayslake@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Rockford
Meetings are held the 1st Monday – 6 p.m.
Rockford Public Library's Montague Branch
1238 S Winnebago St
Rockford, IL 61102
pflagrockford@pflagillinois.org

Parents of Transgender (North Shore)
Meetings are held the 3rd Sunday – 6 p.m.
Winnetka Presbyterian Church
1255 Willow Rd, Winnetka, IL
pflagptnorthshore@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Deerfield
Meetings held 2nd Thursday – 7:15 pm
Congregation BJE
1201 Lake Cook Rd, Deerfield 60015
pflagdeerfield@pflagillinois.org

Parents of Transgender (Chicago)
Meetings are held the 2nd Thursday – 7 pm
Center on Halsted
3656 N Halsted, Chicago 60613
pflagptchicago@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG DuPage
Meetings held 3rd Sunday – 2 pm
St Paul Lutheran Church
515 S Wheaton Ave, Wheaton 60187
pflagdupage@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Metro Chicago
Meetings held 3rd Sunday – 2 pm
Center on Halsted (Senior Room)
3656 N Halsted, Chicago 60613
pflagchicagometro@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Aurora/Fox Valley
Meetings held 2nd Sunday – 2 pm
New England Congregational Church
406 W Galena Blvd, Aurora 60506
pflagaurorafoxvalley@pflagillinois.com

PFLAG Oak Park
Meetings held 4th Sunday – 3 pm
First United Church
848 Lake St, Oak Park 60304
pflagoakpark@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Bolingbrook
Meetings held 2nd Sunday – 2 pm
305 E Boughton Road, Bolingbrook, IL 60440
pflagbolingbrook@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Homer Glen / Lockport
Meetings held Last Tuesday, 6:30–8 pm
Cross of Glory
14719 W. 163rd, Homer Glen, IL
pflaghgl@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Oak Lawn
Meetings held 3rd Sunday – 2 p.m.
Pilgrim Faith UCC
9411 S 51st Ave
Oak Lawn, IL 60453
pflagoaklawn@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Hinsdale
Meetings held 1st Sunday – 2 pm
Unitarian Church Hinsdale
11 W Maple, Hinsdale 60521
pflaghinsdale@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Tinley Park
Meetings held 2nd Sunday – 2-4 pm
Zion Lutheran Church
17100 69th Ave.
Tinley Park, IL 60477
pflagtinleypark@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Ottawa
Meetings held 4th Sunday - 2:30 pm
Open Table United Church of Christ
910 Columbus St., Ottawa, IL 61350
pflagottawa@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Will, Kankakee, Iroquois
Contact Rev. Barbara Lohrbach
revlohrbach@gmail.com
plagkankakee@pflagillinois.org

Click anywhere on the map to open it online

