

Nikki Adams

Honoring Your Lived Experience Through Mindfulness and Yoga

Nikki Adams is a trauma-informed yoga teacher, prevention educator, and the founder of Beauty for Ashes Wellness Cultivation, LLC. With over a six years of experience supporting survivors of sexual violence, Nikki integrates embodied healing, social justice, and nervous system informed practices into every space she leads. She is a 500-hour E-RYT, a lead teacher in a social justice based Yoga Teacher Training program, and has helped expand access for BIPOC practitioners by supporting the graduation of more than twenty yoga teachers of color through scholarships and community centered mentorship. She also teaches a trauma informed yoga program for survivors at Yale University. As a prevention educator with the YWCA Sexual Assault Crisis Service, Nikki teaches youth about consent, boundaries, and healthy relationships, and trains professionals on how to identify grooming, respond to disclosures of sexual abuse, and create trauma-informed environments. She has presented at institutions including UConn, Eastern Connecticut State University, and others, sharing practical tools grounded in compassion, empowerment, and survivor-centered care. Nikki's work is guided by her belief that healing is possible. Her mission is to make holistic, body based practices accessible to all survivors and to support communities in becoming safer, more aware, and more responsive to the realities of trauma and resilience.

Kim Adamski

Inclusive Sex Ed: Best Practices for Families and Professionals

Sexual health educator Kim Adamski uses a conversational, interactive approach in her workshops. She has 15 years of experience in sex education, and provides comprehensive, inclusive, and pleasure-positive programming.

Cindy Lee Alves Watley

Fabulous AND Thriving: Sexuality in the land of Fatphobia

Succulent Self-Care for the Global Majority: Restoring Your Power with Pleasure

Cindy Lee Alves Watley is a distinguished sexologist and coach with over 15 years of experience, navigating difficult dialogues and fostering sexual empowerment. They believe in revolutionary hedonism, prioritizing pleasure in our bodies, our bodies of work, and our communities. As the creator of Ascension Institute, Cindy Lee provides inclusive sexuality education, empowerment coaching, and consulting for the Global Majority, centering Black women, femmes, and nonbinary folks. She believes we deserve to have joy and ease in our lives - that we can "live our

best lives and stay ready” - urging folks to unlearn the toxicity that is colonization and white supremacy while (re)learning and (re)connecting with the power that is one’s innate wisdom.

MaLisa Blasini

Raising Kenny

MaLisa Blasini is a passionate advocate for inclusive family support, specializing in bridging the gap between faith, cultural expectations, and the mental health needs of LGBTQIA+ youth. Drawing from her own experiences, MaLisa focuses on helping families navigate the intersection of traditional Puerto Rican/Latine values and the necessity of radical acceptance. Her mission is to empower caregivers to choose love over fear, fostering safe and affirming environments where children can thrive.

Rishi Black

Spill the Tea: A Space for South Asian/Desi and Queer Folk

Rishi Black (they/them), a member of the LGBTQ+ community is a dedicated advocate for LGBTQ+ health and youth. They recently graduated from Fairfield University with a Bachelor of Science in Biology and Sociology & Anthropology. Rishi brings a wide range of experiences, including reviving and leading Fairfield University’s Gender and Sexuality Alliance, interning with The Health Collective, conducting research in both the natural and social sciences, and working in hospital and pre-hospital clinical settings. They are now an incoming medical student at the University of Connecticut and aspire to become a physician who provides affirming, inclusive care for LGBTQ+ patients. Rishi is excited to bring their diverse experiences together for this presentation and to be part of the movement working to make our systems more inclusive for everyone.

Michael Bloom

What are Hate Crimes?

Michael Bloom serves as the Director of External Relations and Hate Crimes Initiative Coordinator at the Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP). In this dual role, he leads strategic outreach and engagement efforts while coordinating statewide initiatives to prevent, respond to, and raise awareness of hate crimes. Michael brings a deep background in public policy and legislative affairs, having worked as a lobbyist and advisor to various Connecticut state legislators. His extensive experience navigating state government,

combined with his commitment to public safety and equity, positions him as a trusted voice in both policymaking and community relations.

Laurie Bonjo

“Joy as Resistance: Counseling LGBTQ+ Youth Beyond Risk and Deficit”

Dr. Laurie Bonjo (they/them or she/her) is a tenured Associate Professor at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) and a proud first-generation college student. Dr. Bonjo is founding faculty of the doctoral program in Counselor Education and Supervision at SCSU and served as program coordinator during the program’s development and initial implementation from 2018 to 2021. Dr. Bonjo’s teaching, research, and service prioritize decolonization, liberation-centered practice, and resistance to deficit-based paradigms that frame marginalized populations through risk, pathology, or control. Their scholarship centers queer joy, embodiment, critical love, and counter-carceral approaches to counseling and education, with particular attention to LGBTQ+ youth and emerging professionals. Dr. Bonjo’s contributions to the counseling profession have been recognized nationally and regionally. They received the 2024–2025 Connecticut Board of Regents Teaching Award in recognition of excellence in teaching and student engagement. Dr. Bonjo currently serves as the 2024–2025 President of the Association for Counseling Sexology and Sexual Wellness (ACSSW), where they advance affirming, justice-oriented approaches to sexual wellness and counselor education. Their dedication to mentorship has been honored through multiple awards, including Mentor of the Year from the Connecticut Counseling Association (2024), the Society for Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities (SAIGE) in both 2020 and 2024, and Counselor Educator of the Year from the American Mental Health Counseling Association (AMHCA) in 2023.

Christina Borel

Resisting (Dis)order and Reclaiming Neuroqueer Body Trust®

Christina Borel, LCSW, LICSW, (they/them) is a queer non-binary Certified Body Trust® Provider and an independently licensed social worker in Connecticut and Massachusetts. They love building spaces where folx can experiment with sharing more of their truest selves and move toward building a world where all bodies have what they need. Christina runs a practice called Kaleidoscope Growth where they offer individual, group, and family therapy to LGBTQIA+ folx. Kaleidoscope Growth is also home to the Queer Body Trust® Collective, facilitating experimental spaces for radical, embodied and sustainable community/collective care built by, with, and for the queer and trans community. Christina's additional experience includes work as an adjunct instructor at the Simmons University Graduate School of Social Work. They have participated professionally in movement spaces as a practitioner-scholar-activist practitioner since 2005

Monica Brase

Proud Pedagogy: Best Practices for Inclusive Teaching

Dr. Monica Brase has been an urban educator for 24 years, primarily focusing on alternative education and school turnaround. As an educator, she taught science and teen leadership classes, and she served as an advisor for 18 years, founding three LGBTQIA+ clubs in Hartford schools. Dr. Brase is also an educational consultant, founding Brase Educational Consulting, LLC, designing and implementing Youth Participatory Action Research programs, providing leadership coaching for school administrators, and facilitating teacher professional development. She is the founder and Executive Director of EmpowerED Alternatives, Inc, a nonprofit organization with the mission of creating alternative learning opportunities for youth. Currently, she is in the North Star Fellowship, designing a public charter school for disengaged and disconnected youth in the Greater Hartford area using a competency-based education framework. Dr. Brase holds a BS in biochemistry from Oklahoma State University, an MPH in global health from Yale University, and an EdD in educational leadership from the University of Hartford.

David Brown

Fix the School Wall: Real Talk About What Helps (and Hurts) at School

David Steven Brown, Jr. is a school leader, founder, and educational consultant with over 15 years of experience in public, charter, and alternative education. He currently serves as Founding Principal of PROUD Academy, a public charter middle school in Connecticut designed to build inclusive school cultures, student voice, and academic excellence for LGBTQIA+ youth and allies. David is a North Star Fellow with The Mind Trust and a LiberatED SEL Fellow, collaborating with educators nationwide on equity-centered school design. He has served as a high school principal, instructional coach, and science educator, with deep experience designing advisory systems, restorative discipline practices, and school-wide SEL frameworks. As an equity-driven leader, his work centers on institutional responsibility—building school systems that proactively support safety, dignity, and belonging rather than relying on individual student self-advocacy. In addition to his leadership work, David consults with schools and districts on integrating social-emotional learning and restorative practices into daily instruction, discipline, and organizational culture.

Bria Brown-King

Supporting Intersex Youth and Their Families

Bria Brown-King (They/She) is a Black, queer, non-binary, and intersex person. Bria was recently promoted to Associate Executive Director at interACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth. Bria got their start in intersex advocacy in 2018 as an interACT Youth Advocate. In 2019, they became the first openly intersex person to speak about intersex issues on the steps of the Supreme Court. In their current role, Bria facilitates education on intersex issues, works to close the gap in intersex-affirming research and data collection, and serves on multiple advisory boards, representing intersex people nationally and internationally.

Lawrence Bryant

Health Disparities Among African American LGBTQ+ Persons

Dr. Lawrence Bryant is a specialist in substance use disorders (SUD), HIV/AIDS prevention, nicotine addiction, vaping, and multi-perspective approaches to behavioral health issues. With a career spanning five decades, Dr. Bryant has dedicated himself to improving the well-being of older adults, the unhoused, and other underserved groups, including LGBTQ+ persons. Dr. Bryant notably led Georgia's initial response to the opioid epidemic by developing a statewide strategic plan and surveillance data for the Georgia Department of Public Health. Dr Bryant's extensive expertise includes more than 20 peer-reviewed publications on critical topics such as HIV/AIDS, homophobia, and tobacco control. Additionally, with over 50 years as a registered respiratory therapist, he played a significant role during the COVID-19 pandemic, exemplifying his commitment to health and safety during challenging times. Currently, Dr. Bryant serves as a part-time assistant professor at Capella University and Kennesaw State University, where he mentors student dissertations and teaches courses in behavioral health, policy, health promotion, and research strategies. As the Founder and CEO of Passion & Purpose Behavioral Health Consulting Services, LLC, he brings 34 years of personal experience in long-term recovery, guiding others with passion and purpose.

Muhammad Burhan

Trans Health in the Age of AI Bias and Surveillance Capitalism

Burhan (they/them) is a Gen-Z AI Ethicist, trans rights activist, and grassroots community organizer with over a decade of experience advancing intersectional, equitable solutions for

trans and queer communities globally. Their work spans technology, public health, and social justice, focusing on building healthier, safer, and more inclusive systems for marginalized populations. Most recently, Burhan supported more than 30 underrepresented AI, life sciences, and healthcare startups across East Africa, Asia, and the U.S. through MassChallenge, helping entrepreneurs integrate ethical, equitable, and human-centered design principles into innovative solutions. As an AI literacy educator, they have taught over 5,000 individuals about AI bias, algorithmic discrimination, and gender justice, centering BIPOC voices and Global South perspectives through interactive, case-based learning. A seasoned digital advocate, Burhan has led campaigns generating over 100 million impressions and engaged audiences of more than 100,000 across social media platforms, overcoming algorithmic censorship and multiple permanent account deletions. They began their journey in activism and entrepreneurship at age 13, and after arriving in the U.S. as a teenage scholar, have since supported over 100 grassroots organizations, contributing to hundreds of initiatives that advance the well-being of immigrant, queer, and trans communities. Their youth advocacy has been featured in media outlets including Them, Queerty, Pink News, and Teen Vogue. Burhan's work is deeply informed by the belief that no system of oppression exists in isolation. This principle drives their interdisciplinary efforts across climate justice, immigration, public health, LGBTQ+ rights, and technology. They have mobilized millions of dollars toward economic justice initiatives and currently serve as a fellow and consultant for the City of Boston. Burhan also holds leadership and board positions with Stonewall Sports Boston, Out in Tech Boston, and Mass Humanities, Massachusetts' largest humanities grantmaker. Originally from Pakistan, Burhan brings a global perspective to their advocacy, combining lived experience with professional expertise to challenge systemic inequities and amplify underrepresented voices. They specialize in bridging the gap between technology and social justice, equipping communities with the knowledge and tools to critically engage with AI-driven systems, challenge exclusionary design, and advocate for trans rights through gender- and digital-justice frameworks

Emmett Burns

Advocating for Equity: Empowering Educators to Support LGBTQ+ Students

Poetry as Power: Writing Yourself into Existence

Emmett Burns (he/they) is a queer, disabled, trans person local to CT. He is an educator, artist, and activist committed to creating more inclusive and welcoming spaces for everyone. In high school and college, Emmett led protests to support transgender students, advocating for access to gender-neutral restrooms and the use of chosen names. This sparked a lifelong dedication to LGBTQ+ advocacy. In addition to their activism, Emmett is a talented poet who explores the connections between art and social justice. He also enjoys adaptive hiking and loves curating playlists to share.

Jovanni Cabanas / Xiomarie LaBeija

LGBT & ME: An inclusive dive into our history

My name is Jovanni also known as CT's own Xiomarie LaBeija. During my 9-5 I am a Safe Space Coordinator and an HIV STI Testrer & educator at APNH in New Haven, CT. I've been doing this line of work for 4 years. Outside of my 9-5, I am a professional drag entertainer going on 15 years of performing, an advocate, educating and empowering about lgbtq+ needs, especially needs in the black and brown. I am also the Mother of the CT Chapter of LaBeija, so I also educate on ballroom both the kiki and mainstream scene.

Britt Carilli

Neuroqueer Emergence: Clinical Best Practices for Supporting Identity and Sexuality Exploration in Young Adults

Britt Carilli, LCSW, LICSW is a licensed trauma therapist, clinical educator, and co-founder at Lorikeet Collective, PLLC. She unites their lived experience as a late recognized Autistic and ADHD person with inclusive, affirming practices to assist in the healing journeys of neurodivergent and LGBTQIA2S+ folx of various backgrounds.

Alberto Cifuentes, Jr.

Ensuring Sexual Justice for All: Micro and Macro Approaches to Centering Sexual Dignity, Autonomy, and Freedom

Alberto Cifuentes, Jr., PhD, LMSW, is an Assistant Professor and BSW Program Coordinator at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU). At SCSU's School of Social Work, he teaches undergraduate and graduate generalist and macro practice, policy, and research. His research has focused on how stigma impacts the health outcomes of male sex workers. His future research will explore how sex workers organize for their rights and safety and use mutual aid as a tool for crisis intervention, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Cifuentes is a professional community organizer and policy advocate who has served as a leader in several non-profit organizations, including GLSEN Connecticut and the National Association of Social Workers' Connecticut Chapter (NASW/CT). He served 15 years on the Board of Directors of GLSEN Connecticut and had the roles of Chair, Community Outreach Coordinator, and, his most treasured role, Student Organizing Adult Coordinator. As Student Organizing Adult Coordinator, he was able to direct a group of Grades 6-12 students to facilitate LGBTQ-themed workshops all across the state, including the True Colors Conference. At NASW/CT, he served as Co-chair of the Latino/a Social Workers Network where he directed a mentoring program for Latino/a social work students. He currently serves as Chair/Founder of the Macro Social Workers Network that has sponsored multiple career panels and social events for macro practitioners throughout the state. In terms of policy advocacy, he was involved in the campaign to grant undocumented students access to institutional aid at public colleges and universities led by Connecticut

Students for a Dream (C4D). He was also a member of Hartford Action, an organization with the mission to eliminate police brutality and improve relations between law enforcement and Hartford residents. Dr. Cifuentes is a board member of the Association for Community Organization and Social Action (ACOSA) where he serves as Macro Social Work Student Network (MSWSN) Liaison. He is the recipient of several awards and national grants, including the Distinguished Service Award from Connecticut Latinos Achieving Rights and Opportunities (CLARO) and the Health Policy Research Scholars fellowship from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. He currently lives in Hamden with his life partner Stanley and enjoys reading, watching the soap Day of Our Lives, going to new restaurants, and singing Karaoke.

Nia Clark

Voices for Equality: Moving Hearts and Changing Minds Through Storytelling

Nia Clark (MSW) has spent 20 years changing systems from within as a consultant, trainer, direct service provider, researcher, and LGBTQ+ youth advocate. From 2006-2014, she was a residential care counselor and Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) trainer at The Home for Little Wanderers in Massachusetts. From 2015-2017 Nia was the Mentoring Coordinator at LifeWorks mentoring program at the Los Angeles LGBT Center and supervised nearly 50 active one-to-one matches between LGBTQ+ youth and adults each year. In 2016, she was the consulting producer of the Emmy-nominated MTV documentary, TRANSFORMATION, a film featuring herself and six trans & gender diverse youth. Nia is currently Senior Specialist of Strategic Outreach & Training at Human Rights Campaign Foundation where she creates and facilitates programming such as Voices for Equality - a 3-hour, in-person workshop that empowers LGBTQ+ advocates and allies to change the hearts and minds of others by sharing powerful personal stories with intention and Next Level, a virtual course that provides skills-based education and resources to LGBTQ+ young adults who desire more economic stability. She was additionally a contributing author to Oxford University's 2022 textbook publication Social work practice with the LGBTQ community: The intersection of history, health, mental health and policy factors (2nd ed.). A record-breaking three-time Point Foundation Scholar, Nia obtained her master's degree in Advanced Clinical Social Work from Simmons University in Boston.

Mel Cordner

GSA Student Meetup

Mel (they/them) is the founding Executive Director of Q Plus, which works with local youth leaders to run programming designed to uplift and empower queer youth across Connecticut and online. We also offer professional development training and parent and caregiver support and education groups, run special events like open mics and advocacy workshops, and more! Check us out at www.qplusct.org!

Kristen Craven

Female Choice: How Consent Has Shaped Evolution

My name is Kristen Craven! I am currently a high school Biology and Environmental Science teacher. I got my B.S in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology from UConn and graduated in 2021. I went back to UConn for my masters in Curriculum and Instruction and graduated in 2022. In my free time, I coach marching band and winter guard at a local high school.

Kimberly D'Auria

Bringing LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum and Mindful Practices Into Your Classroom

Kimberly D'Auria is a high school educator dedicated to creating inclusive, equitable, and socially conscious learning environments for all students and colleagues. A fierce ally to the LGBTQIA community and marginalized youth, Kimberly serves as the founder, co-chair, and co-commissioner of CEA Pride, where they have been instrumental in expanding LGBTQIA advocacy, visibility, and professional support across Connecticut's education community. At the high school level, Kimberly has been the GSA Advisor at Danbury High School for over 14 years, providing sustained mentorship, advocacy, and safe-space leadership for LGBTQIA students and allies. On a national scale, Kimberly helps write National LGBTQ+ curriculum through the NEA Teaching Fellowship, collaborates with Making Gay History to develop historically grounded learning resources, and is an active member of the NEA LGBTQ+ Caucus. Their leadership and unwavering commitment have been recognized through the CEA Connecticut Harvey Milk and Sylvia Rivera Human Rights Award, honoring their impactful work in secondary education and advocacy for LGBTQIA students and educators. Since 2014, Kimberly has engaged in extensive professional development focused on anti-racism, LGBTQIA inclusion, and social and emotional learning (SEL). Currently serving high school students, administrative staff and educators, Kimberly integrates LGBTQIA-inclusive practices, student/ educator advocacy, and social-emotional skill-building into everyday classroom life. Their mission is to ensure that every student and staff members—especially those from marginalized communities—feels seen, valued, supported, and empowered to thrive.

Jeremy Darling

Standing in Wise Solidarity w/ Trans Folks

Jeremy is an AASECT Certified Sex Therapist with experience providing outpatient therapy for more than 10 years. He leads a group private practice focused on providing decolonized therapy to the Worcester area that receives and supports all walks of life but specializes in creating safe spaces for trans folks and those who come from marginalized communities. Darling Mental

Health provides the following services: individual therapy, couples/relational/poly-affirming therapy, group therapy, sex education, clinical supervision for the ethical provision of sex and gender-affirming therapy.

Jacquilyn Davis, CDP®

Proud Minds, Safe Spaces: Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth Mental Health

Jacquilyn Davis, CDP® is currently the Director of Learning & Workforce Development at Mental Health Connecticut, Inc. She is a Certified Diversity Professional (CDP®), Mental Health First Aid Instructor, and Insights Discovery Client Practitioner. With nearly two decades of experience in the mental health field, Jacquilyn empowers individuals and organizations to foster safe, inclusive, and mentally healthy environments. As a coach, mentor, educator, and speaker, Jacquilyn partners with others on their personal and professional growth journeys through open dialogue, interactive workshops, and engaging presentations that promote safe, inclusive, and mentally healthy environments.

Jaime Delgado

Masculinity, Reimagined: Support for Transmen & Transmasculine Folks

Hey, I'm Jaime (ZHY-meh), co-founder of The Hinterlands. I'm a culture and identity consultant, trauma and psychedelic therapist, fiber artist, and mentor rooted in liberation-based practice. My work is shaped by a lifelong commitment to healing, community-building, and supporting people navigating systems that were never designed with us in mind. I grew up in Waterbury, Connecticut, where I learned early how to advocate for myself and others. As a teenager, I organized with Food Not Bombs!, staged school protests, and embraced life as a proud black sheep. Those early experiences continue to inform my belief that healing and resistance are deeply intertwined. My path has been nonlinear by design. I trained as a classical actor and singer, gaining deep respect for artists, performers, and gig workers. I later entered social work, hoping to support families impacted by carceral systems. After several years working in foster care, I recognized the limits of state-based helping models and began seeking more humane, relational ways of offering care. I am proudly Kriol, transgender, autistic, and dynamically disabled. I believe everyday living is a practical art, and inner development is essential for collective liberation. I'm honored to walk alongside others as we imagine and practice more just, connected ways of being.

Lynn Discenza

Stonewall Speakers Training

Lynn has been a Stonewall Speaker for more than a decade. Over the past few years Lynn has revitalized the organization in leading us forward through many different roles including, Trainer,

Coordinator, Secretary and President. Lynn is an LGBTQ+ activist. As a trans woman she is dedicated to creating safe spaces, providing education and support to those in the LGBTQ+ community. She founded and serves as Vice president of PFLAG Waterbury, is a member of the Greater Waterbury LGBTQ+ Pride Coalition representing PFLAG and Stonewall Speakers. Lynn is an active member of St. Patrick St. Anthony Catholic Church in Hartford, and is co-leader of their Open Hearts LGBTQ+ ministry. She serves on the advisory board for Equality CT and is a Introduction to Trans and Nonbinary Affirmation for the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ. She resides in Farmington CT and has 3 children, a foster son and 4 grandchildren. She is an engineer by profession and currently is working full time as a Structures engineer on aircraft engines.

Cole DiSorbo

GSA Leadership Transitions: When all your officers are graduating, how do you prepare?

Cole (he/they) is the GSA Coordinator at Qplus, a grassroots non profit here in CT focused on empowering, supporting, and uplifting queer youth. He spends much of his professional life running youth activity groups, visiting schools to provide GSA support, and planning queer educational events. In his personal time, Cole can usually be found crocheting in unexpected places or out foraging in the woods with his dog.

Stefanie Dominguez

Out Film CT Presents: Making Queer Movies!

Stefanie is a special education teacher with a passion for supporting all students to feel safe and welcome at school. She also has a degree in Communication with a focus in film and television production and loves quality children's media!

Rachel Doyle

Sort-of Accepting: Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth in Families That are Still Learning

Rachel Doyle, PhD (she/they), is a licensed psychologist and the founder of Aspen Psychological Center, a gender-affirming private practice serving children, adolescents, adults, and families in Connecticut and New York. They provide virtual therapy and consultation with a focus on supporting nonbinary, transgender, and gender-diverse youth, neurodivergent individuals, and families navigating identity development, trauma, and complex systems of care. Dr. Doyle's

clinical work centers children and youth experiencing anxiety, mood changes, emotional dysregulation, and post-traumatic stress, particularly when these concerns intersect with neurodivergence, gender exploration, or family stress. They have extensive experience supporting youth with ADHD, autism, and sensory differences, and approach neurodivergence as a meaningful aspect of identity rather than something to be “fixed.” Their work emphasizes helping young people build emotional regulation, self-advocacy, and self-trust across home, school, and medical settings. A core part of Dr. Doyle’s practice involves working with parents and caregivers. They support families who are learning how to better understand and affirm their child while navigating uncertainty, fear, or competing values. Dr. Doyle collaborates with schools, pediatric providers, and multidisciplinary teams when helpful, including participation in IEP and 504 meetings and consultation around medical decision-making. In addition to therapy, Dr. Doyle offers professional consultation, training, and clinical supervision for clinicians and organizations seeking to strengthen affirming, trauma-informed, and neurodiversity-affirming practices. As a queer clinician, Dr. Doyle is committed to creating spaces that honor lived experience, complexity, and authenticity, and to supporting growth that is steady, humane, and deeply respectful.

Kayla Edgeworth

Creating a Safe Space: Understanding and Discussing Domestic Violence

Kayla is a Community Educator at the Prudence Crandall Center, where she delivers outreach, education, and prevention programming on domestic violence and healthy relationships. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice and Forensic Psychology from the University of New Haven in 2015 and is currently pursuing a Master’s degree in Criminal Justice at Central Connecticut State University. Her background includes work in victim advocacy, juvenile mental health, and domestic violence prevention. She is committed to empowering survivors and fostering safe, informed communities through education and advocacy.

Erinn Eichinger

In Transition: A Story of Growth, Courage, and Conversations That Build Understanding

Erinn Eichinger is a documentary filmmaker, educator, and longtime television professional whose work centers on storytelling to educate and advocate. She is the producer of *In Transition*. The documentary that follows a mother and her transgender son on a parallel journey of identity, love, and acceptance. Erinn also spent years working in television, where she honed her skills in production, story development, and she now brings that real-world experience into the classroom teaching at the college level.

Afnan Elmaghrabi

Afnan Elmaghrabi is a dedicated mental health professional with extensive experience in supporting diverse populations through various life challenges. Her journey in mental health services began as a graduate intern at Casa Youth Shelter in Los Alamitos, where she worked with under-served minorities, including homeless and runaway youth residing in a group home. This population often faced significant struggles such as addiction, gang violence, mental health issues, and family discord, all of which intensified their existing mental health conditions. Following this, Afnan served as an Associate Marriage and Family Intern at CCS/Calworks for Pathways by Molina. In this clinic, she primarily assisted low-income Hispanic single parents who were beneficiaries of Medi-Cal insurance and government assistance programs aimed at improving their educational and employment opportunities. Her career then expanded into several treatment centers where she provided care for individuals dealing with substance abuse, eating disorders, and codependency. These roles allowed her to develop a comprehensive understanding of various mental health conditions and the intricacies involved in treating them. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Afnan transitioned into private practice, utilizing telehealth platforms to continue serving a diverse clientele through Kaiser and Blue Cross-Blue Shield Insurance. Her client base has included individuals with symptoms of PTSD, borderline personality disorder, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, unhealthy attachment styles, and gender dysphoria. In this capacity, she has focused on psychoeducation and the implementation of evidence-based practices to help clients manage their conditions effectively. In addition to her professional work, Afnan is deeply committed to community service, reflected in her volunteer efforts with various non-profit organizations. She has supported parents from low socio-economic backgrounds, providing them with the necessary tools and resources to improve their family dynamics and overall well-being. Currently, Afnan is passionate about spreading awareness and promoting inclusivity for LGBTQ+ Muslims. Her dedication to this cause ties into her broader mission of fostering resilience, mental health awareness, and inclusivity across all populations she serves. Through her diverse experiences and compassionate approach, Afnan continues to make a significant impact in the field of mental health and beyond.

Jade Esteban Estrada

Más Que Una Identidad: How Culture, Family, and Queerness Shape Latine LGBTQIA+ Lives

Jade Esteban Estrada, professionally known as The Prada Enchilada, is an internationally recognized comedian, actor, writer, and cultural commentator whose work explores identity, performance, and LGBTQIA+ representation within contemporary popular culture. A Las Vegas headliner for the Sapphire Comedy Hour, Estrada has sustained a multidisciplinary career distinguished by global performance, media engagement, and contributions to academic and civic discourse. Estrada began his professional career in the entertainment industry as a choreographer for Latin music icon Charo and as a scratch vocalist for the Backstreet Boys. These early experiences informed his understanding of performance as both artistic practice and commercial enterprise. He later gained national visibility through recurring appearances on The

Jerry Springer Show, positioning his work at the intersection of performance, spectacle, and social commentary. Throughout his career, Estrada has headlined comedy venues, performing arts centers, and higher-education institutions across the United States and internationally. He has performed at more than 350 Pride events worldwide, underscoring his sustained engagement with LGBTQ+ communities and advocacy spaces. His international stage credits include The Second City, Laugh Factory Chicago, The Comedy Zone, Oz New Orleans on Bourbon Street, Sea Gaia Resort in Japan, and Paleis van de Weemoed in Amsterdam's Red Light District, reflecting the cross-cultural reach and adaptability of his work. Estrada's television and media credits include appearances on the Emmy Award-winning series 30 Rock (NBC), The Graham Norton Effect (Comedy Central), and hosting duties for the 19th Annual South Florida GLAAD Media Awards on Bravo. He is also featured in the Netflix documentary Outstanding: An LGBTQ+ Celebration, which situates his contributions within a broader historical and cultural context of queer comedy. His festival appearances include the Edinburgh Festival Fringe; Fringe World in Perth, Australia; Rubber City Comedy Festival (Best of Fest Award, 2023; Boast Rattle Champion, 2023); P3 Comedy Festival (Headliner); LGBTLOL Comedy Festival; Sixth City Comedy Festival; Vatos Locos Comedy Festival; Tower City Comedy Festival (Top Three Finalist); and the Floodwater Comedy Festival. Estrada has shared the stage with influential figures in comedy, including Phyllis Diller, Richard Lewis, Gallagher, Iliza Shlesinger, Heather McDonald, and Joey Medina. In addition to his performance career, Estrada is an experienced public intellectual and guest lecturer. He has been invited to speak at Princeton University, the University of California, Berkeley, Harvard University, and the Hubrecht Institute at Utrecht University, where his presentations have examined LGBTQ+ visibility, humor as cultural critique, and performance as a tool for social engagement. In 2025, he served as a presenter and keynote speaker at the SOGIECON True Colors Conference, contributing to national conversations on sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and intersectionality. Critical reception of Estrada's work reflects his standing as both an entertainer and cultural figure. The Richmond Times-Dispatch has described him as "a master entertainer," while Phoenix New Times has praised him as "absolutely super-fabulous." Collectively, his career demonstrates a sustained commitment to performance as an artistic, cultural, and scholarly adjacent practice, positioning Estrada as a significant voice in contemporary comedy and LGBTQ+ cultural discourse.

Charisma Farrington

True Colors Adventure Lab

Charisma Farrington is a creative powerhouse who believes learning should feel like an adventure. She's a psychology-minded educator, a natural host, and the friend who always brings the perfect mix of humor, heart, and organization to any space. Charisma designs workshops that help young people explore identity, kindness, and community through games, art, and hands-on fun. She's passionate about making everyone feel included and celebrated, and she brings her signature mix of warmth, wit, and creativity to everything she does. Based in Massachusetts, Charisma spends her time building community, crafting playful experiences, and helping others shine in their true colors.

Sarah Field

Queer Joy in Schools

I am a queer, nonbinary educator and the cofounder of Rainbow Alliance CT. My current focus is advocacy and professional development training sessions for educators and social workers in support of LGBTQIA+ students.

Francis Furmanek

Virtual Social Networking for Gender-Affirming Healthcare

Francis is an agender person, licensed clinical social worker, adjunct instructor, and PhD candidate from Connecticut. They earned their MSW from Sacred Heart University. Francis also holds a certificate in Community-Based Integrated Health and Development from the Comprehensive Rural Health Project in Jamkhed, India. Their practice expertise is in mindfulness, trauma-informed care, and civic engagement. Francis' research interests include the LGBTQIA+ community, health disparities, and policy.

Scott S. Garbini

Supporting Trans Students in the College Search: Guidance for Educators As transgender and gender-expansive students navigate the already complex world of college admissions, they often face additional layers of uncertainty, vulnerability, and systemic ba

For more than two decades, Scott Garbini has dedicated his career to creating equitable, affirming, and accessible educational pathways for LGBTQIA+ students from high school through college and beyond. As an educator, consultant, policy writer, and advocate, he has worked at the intersection of student support, institutional change, and social justice, championing the belief that every young person deserves to learn in environments that recognize, respect, and celebrate their full identity. Scott is the founder and principal of Garbini Education and Career Consulting LLC, a one-on-one, student-centered practice that specializes in helping families navigate the transition from secondary school to college or the workforce. With a particular emphasis on transgender and gender-expansive youth, Scott has guided hundreds of students through individualized planning that prioritizes safety, affirmation, mental health, and fit—not just admissions outcomes. His deep understanding of the unique barriers faced by LGBTQIA+ students has made him a sought-after expert for families seeking support that is both compassionate and informed by current research, campus policy landscapes, and best practices in inclusion. Scott's commitment to policy work began during his tenure on the New London Board of Education, where he made history by authoring and implementing the district's first Inclusive Policy—one of the earliest comprehensive protections for LGBTQIA+ students in the region. The policy set new standards for equitable treatment, student rights, staff training, and

school culture, and it continues to influence local conversations about inclusion today. This work also ignited his ongoing dedication to developing frameworks that support students who exist at the intersection of multiple identities, including LGBTQIA+ youth, first-generation students, and those from historically marginalized communities. Over the years, Scott has been invited to speak at conferences, webinars, and professional gatherings across the country, sharing his expertise on creating inclusive admissions practices, supporting transgender youth in educational transitions, and building institutional accountability through policy. He has served as both President and Director of Diversity, Equity, and Access for the Higher Education Consultants Association (HECA), where he helped expand the organization's commitments to equity-focused professional development.

Silvia Hammer

Trans Parents not Transparent: Exploring the Unique Challenges and Questions of Caregivers

Silvia Hammer is a transgender woman getting her doctorate at the University of Hartford. As part of her training in pursuit of her degree, she is interning at the Yale Gender Program. Silvia has a clinical focus in providing trauma and neurodiversity informed care to LGBTQ+ people across lifespan, and other peoples of marginalized experiences. Additionally, Silvia has a history of running support group for transgender youth, adults, and their families. She currently runs the Yale Gender Program's ongoing bimonthly parent support group.

Briana Hewitt

To Infinity & Beyond: Understanding the Intersectionality of Gender, Sexuality, Race, & Autism.

Briana Hewitt, MS, is a Peer Support Specialist for the "Walk With Me" program at Wheeler Clinic. She is located at the Family Health and Wellness Center in Waterbury and Bristol, CT. She received her BA in Psychology from the University of Hartford in 2021; and went on to earn her MS in Psychology, Child & Adolescent Development, as well as Graduate Certificate in Counseling, Contemporary Theory in Mental Health Services, from Capella University in 2024 and 2025, respectively. She identifies as a heteroromantic demisexual (i.e., asexuality spectrum); and is autistic, having, too, direct experience working with autistic children and pre-teens. Briana is currently pursuing a career in Life Coaching; specializing in Relationship Coaching.

Caspian Horn

The Power of Publishing: Poetry, Zines; Writing as Resistance

I'm Caspian! I am 26 years old and a Social Work student at ECSU, I advocate for the rights of queer and disabled people in my free time and learn to blend that with my creative pursuits

Kyle Humphreys

Gender 201: Relearning Gender

Kyle Humphreys was the first Manager & Associate Director of LGBTQ+ Affairs at Sacred Heart University, a Catholic institution in Fairfield, CT. Drawing upon lived experiences, community, and service to LGBTQ+ folks, they routinely present to audiences of all types looking to understand gender beyond sensationalized headlines.

Avery Irons

Introduction To AFFIRM Pro: A Different Way to Approach Workforce Change
Supporting Families of LGBTQ+ Youth

Avery Irons is a member of the National SOGIE Center. Her training, technical assistance, and policy work has focused on increasing supports and funding streams for community-based prevention and alternative programs, reducing racial and ethnic disparities, and strengthening protections for vulnerable populations in contact with justice systems. She has held positions at the New York State Youth Justice Institute, the National Center for Youth Opportunity and Justice, the Los Angeles LGBT Center's RISE Program, the Juvenile Justice Project at the Correctional Association of New York, and Children's Defense Fund-New York.

Rosa Lee Klaneski

Trans Know Your Rights

Attorney Klaneski has 20 years of lived trans experience, has completed a B.A. in Women's Studies and an M.A. in Public Policy Analysis from Trinity College as well as completed a J.D. at Western New England University School of Law. Attorney Klaneski practices law in Springfield, MA where she works as an attorney at the non-profit Center for Social Justice helping serve marginalized communities. She is also a Director at the Health Collective.

Alice Leibowitz

Being with the Backlash: Facing the Losses, Facing the Grief
Backlash Talkback -- How do you feel about anti-queer, anti-youth policies?

Alice Leibowitz bio Alice Leibowitz is a longtime activist, facilitator, and trainer, and is the Founder of the online coaching business, Conversations Against Fascism. A pioneer in the bisexual movement from 1987 to 2005, Alice directed the LGB Campus Center at the University of Wisconsin 1995-1996 and co-founded the Transcending Boundaries Conference on bisexual, transgender, and intersex issues in 2001. Since 2020, Alice has been empowering people to leverage their love and power to create a world where everyone is safe, valued, and free. She

helps people confront and process their feelings about the toughest global crises – fascism, genocide, climate collapse – and come out the other side resolute, grounded, and inspired. Alice believes that being right about an issue is not enough. Meaningful results come from looking deeply at our experience in the company of others. Influenced by disciplines including Nonviolent Communication, personal development, social justice, organizational development, and somatic methods, Alice’s work lives at the intersection of personal growth and progressive social change. To learn more about Alice’s work, go to www.linktr.ee/conversationsagainstfascism.

Brayden Malley

Using IFS C Audience Concepts to Empower and Support Families of LGBTQ+ Youth in Treatment

Brayden Malley, MS, LMFT (he/they) is a licensed marriage and family therapist in the state of Connecticut. He works full time in a federally qualifying health center on the shoreline and his practice encompasses older adolescents through older adults. Brayden earned both his bachelors and his masters degrees at Central Connecticut State University. While at CCSU he was awarded the LGBT advocacy and activism award through the University LGBT Center. Currently, Brayden serves as the secretary for the Queer and Trans Advocacy Network through the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. He also sits on the DEI Committee for CTAMFT. In his spare time Brayden enjoys crafts, baking, and time spent at the beach.

John Raymond Martinez-De Jesus

Open Conversation on Puerto Rican/Latine and Queer Intersectionality

John Raymond Martinez-De Jesus is an Afro-Boricua, Two-Spirit, first-generation “Latine-American” engagement expert, community organizer, and social justice advocate. With a passion for elevating marginalized communities, John’s work focuses on healing, empowerment, and creating pathways to resources for those most in need. His presence in any space is an act of resistance, reflecting his commitment to dismantling systemic oppression. John's motto has always been to, "Help the living, love the youth and heal the dead." John’s notable projects include collaborations with Lady Gaga’s Born This Way Foundation and Mental Health Connecticut, participating in the Connecticut Department of Public Health’s COVID-19 COS project, and revitalizing the Waterbury Puerto Rican Day Parade and Festival. He has also led impactful media campaigns, including TV ads on **Univision, Telemundo, and NBC**, and social media/printed media initiatives that reached diverse audiences to promote health equity, Boricua/Latine culture and LGBTQ+ awareness. As a researcher, John contributed to a groundbreaking study on unhoused youth barriers at the Institute for Community Research. He also served as a Community Outreach Specialist for Connecticut’s DPH, designing programs that improved health outcomes and data collection through innovative outreach and LGBTQ+

humility training. Currently, John works at **Planned Parenthood**, where he conducts community organizing and advocacy around health care, gender-affirming care, and human rights. In this role, he is committed to mobilizing communities and advocating for equitable access to care, particularly for BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities.

Venette Maurice

Practice What We Teach: Sustainable Care for Queer & Trans Helpers, Healers, and Community Leaders

Venette T. Maurice is a birth worker and longtime direct care provider committed to supporting Black, Indigenous, other POC, and queer families through pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period. Based in Massachusetts, Venette offers holistic, affirming, and justice-rooted doula care that centers bodily autonomy, informed choice, and culturally responsive support. Venette’s path to birth work is grounded in many years of frontline community care. Before becoming a doula, she worked in case management, health advocacy, and community-based services—supporting people living with HIV, individuals impacted by housing insecurity, mental health and substance use challenges, immigrants, youth, and people across diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. This deep direct-care background shapes her trauma-informed, relational approach to birth support. As a birth and postpartum doula, Venette provides physical, emotional, and educational support to birthing people and their partners, acts as an advocate within medical systems, and helps families navigate complex information so they can make empowered decisions about their care. Her practice is especially attentive to the lived experiences of Black families and queer birthing people navigating systems that often fail to see or protect them. Venette incorporates gentle, holistic healing practices into her work when welcomed, alongside training in gender-affirming birth work, lactation support, sexuality education, and herbal care. She is also deeply passionate about cultivating sustainable models of care—for herself and for others who hold, support, and witness people through profound life transitions—believing that collective care must include the wellbeing of caregivers themselves. Across all her work, Venette is guided by a commitment to reproductive justice, collective healing, and honoring birth as a transformative and sacred life event.

Sampson McCormick

Having the Important Conversations in Our Communities & Online

Thursday Keynote Panel

Sampson McCormick is a pioneering black gay stand up comedian, writer and filmmaker who has been using art and humor to create dialogue around race, religion, society and sexuality. He is the author of three books, including “Carefree Black Boy”; and has appeared on BET, TV One, VICELAND, Amazon Prime, in 2017 made history as the first LGBTQ comedian to perform at a

Smithsonian Museum and has been named by QUEERTY as “One of the 8 History making LGBTQ Comedians Who Set the Stage for Modern Queer Comedy”.

Robin P. McHaelen, MSW

Thursday opening and closing moderator

Robin P. McHaelen, MSW is the founder and former Executive Director of True Colors, Inc. The recipient of numerous State and National awards, Robin has co-authored two books, a book chapter, several articles on LGBTQ+ youth and is considered a nationally recognized thought leader. Robin is a nationally known trainer regarding the unique concerns, challenges, and strengths of LGBTQ+ youth. She has provided interactive, universally well-received training to more than 30,000 teachers, administrators, child welfare professionals, health care providers, corporations, and various non-profit organizations over the past 25 years. She is an adjunct professor at Central Connecticut State University, teaching Intergroup Communications, Human Sexuality and Social Work with LGBTQ+ Clients. She is an appointed member of Connecticut’s Hate Crimes Commission and is Secretary of the LGBTQ Justice and Opportunity Network.

Molly Morel

Legal Name Changes in CT

I’m Molly. I’m a 24-year-old (25 by the conference) trans woman and lesbian. I’ve lived in Connecticut my entire life and did my undergrad in Geosciences at UConn. I started medically transitioning last November and its been a ride. I love getting involved with my community and meet all types of cool people.

Nicole Melissa Morin, LICSW

Rediscovering the Lost Third Place: Identifying, Embracing, and Expanding LGBTQIA+ Youth Programming Beyond Institutional Walls

Nicole Melissa Morin, LICSW (she/her/hers) is currently the clinician for Safe Homes, a community drop-in center for LGBTQIA+ youth 14-23, and The PLACE (Program for Learning, Activities, Care, and Encouragement) for Empowerment Dept. of Mental Health Young Adult Access Center for young adults ages 16-26. As an affirmative practice therapist, Nicole creates spaces that encourage personal exploration and discovery. She thrives on providing education and support to those who haven’t yet found the language to express themselves. Nicole is also an educator for The Bridge Training Institute in Worcester, MA teaching clinicians, educators, and community professionals to care more effectively for living beings from breath to death.

Kay Munez

Organizing Essentials for Change

Mary Nedela

Using IFS C Audience Concepts to Empower and Support Families of LGBTQ+ Youth in Treatment

Mary Nedela is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in the state of Connecticut and AAMFT Approved Supervisor. She is an Assistant Professor in the Marriage and Family Therapy Program at Central Connecticut State University and also a founding member of the Newington Pride Steering Committee. She has comprehensive clinical experience working in various clinical settings, including in-home programs, in-patient style settings, and outpatient settings. She is particularly passionate about LGTBQ+ individuals and their relationships with family, friends, and partners. Additionally, she is driven to increase the quantity and quality of clinical services available to LGBTQ+ communities. Her specific research area of interest includes relational well-being among bi+ individuals and their partners.

Gabrielle Navarro

The current state of LGBTQ+ rights in Healthcare and Education

Gabrielle Navarro (she/her/ella) works at GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD Law) running the legal helpline, GLAD Law Answers. Through strategic litigation, public policy advocacy, and education, GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD Law) works in New England and nationally to create a just society free of discrimination based on gender identity and expression, HIV status, and sexual orientation. Gabrielle began working at GLAD Law in November 2021. She previously was heavily involved in youth work, and specifically supporting and advocating for LGBTQ+ youth, in central Massachusetts. She also teaches yoga and meditation and is a Reiki practitioner. She loves wellness, coffee, art, and being an auntie.

Joleen M Nevers

Rubber Wear

Joleen has presented at True Colors for over a decade and is a certified sexuality educator. She created and implemented the award winning UConn Sexperts peer education group and their programs that are both nationally and regionally recognized. Additionally, she is committed to reducing harm and creating opportunities to build community together to learn and grow with one another.

Kerrie O'Connor

The A, B, C's

I have an alternative healing business for the last 26yrs. I have studied healing techniques from Reiki to shamanism. I educate on seeing ourselves as more than our physical bodies beings. Emphasis on when we are balanced we have more success in every aspect of our lives. I give simple tools you come do daily.ex.vagus nerve "hacks" for nervous system, a.m and pm intention practice to prepare for day and better sleep. I would like to present my beginners class called " The A,B,C's of Energy Awareness: Living a Balanced life " my website is www.kerrieoconnor.com for long biography and the different classes I offer. Thank you

Robyn Ochs

All the Letters: 10 Things that Gen Z Knows about LGBTQIA+ Identity That Others May Not
Bisexual+ Youth: Challenging Stigma and Reducing Disparities

Robyn Ochs is an educator, speaker, grassroots advocate, and editor of Bi Women Quarterly and two anthologies: the 42-country collection Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World and RECOGNIZE: The Voices of Bisexual Men. Her writings have been published in numerous bi+, women's studies, multicultural, and LGBTQ+ anthologies, and she has taught courses on LGBTQ+ history & politics at three universities. Among other things, she crafted the definition of bisexuality used by many bi+ activists around the world: "I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge in myself the potential to be attracted — romantically and/or sexually — to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree." She was named by Teen Vogue as one of "9 Bisexual Women Who are Making History," and she was chosen to represent Massachusetts on the Advocate's "50 States, 50 Heroes" list. In 2024, she was named an LGBT History Icon. Robyn is deeply committed to intersectional and sustainable activism, to working with others to build coalitions across identities and across social movements, to supporting emerging leaders, and to learning and growing. She is particularly interested in bi+ health, the experiences of bi+ people in the workplace, the global bi+ movement, bi+ elders, and bi and LGBTQIA+ youth. Robyn lives in Massachusetts and on May 17, 2004, on the first day it was legal to do so, she married Peg Preble. They were among the very first same-sex couples legally married in the U.S. She served for 12 years on the board of directors of MassEquality, Massachusetts's statewide LGBTQ+ advocacy organization. During her time on the board, equal marriage was successfully defended (2007) and the Transgender Equal Rights Bill was passed (2011). Robyn has spoken in 49 U.S. states and in 21 countries. An activist for 50 years (so far), she is in it for the long haul.

Cliff Oliver

Footprints from the 1950s to 2025

73 year old retired gay teacher who has lived through the homophobia in the 1950's to the same in 2025. I'm a survivor of the lack of care as a gay child, childhood sexual abuse, loss of long term partner to complications of AIDS. A serious car accident forced this all to the forefront. Therapy is ongoing but I have learned a lot. The teacher in me wants to help others to see the story, to discuss, to help, and to guide.

William Ollayos

Know Your History, Know Your Rights: Using Connecticut's LGBTQ+ Legal Milestones to Empower Youth Advocacy

William Bruce "Bill" Ollayos is a Connecticut-based law student, advocate, and policy fellow dedicated to advancing LGBTQ+ rights and youth empowerment. A JD Candidate at Quinnipiac University School of Law, Bill works at the Connecticut General Assembly as a Law & Policy Fellow with the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity—an office that centers equity and lived experience in policymaking. He also serves as Administrator of the Connecticut LGBTQ+ Justice & Opportunity Network, working closely with statewide partners to strengthen protections for queer and trans youth in schools, healthcare, and community programs. Before entering law, Bill spent years working directly with students in higher education, coordinating residential communities at Wesleyan University that emphasized belonging, identity, and support. This experience continues to shape his work, reinforcing his belief that policy must be informed by on-the-ground realities and that young people are strongest when they know their rights. Bill will join Robinson & Cole LLP in Hartford as an Associate in September 2026. His long-term goals include public interest work, legislative impact, and education policy.

Kathyria Oyola

Question Persuade Refer: Gatekeeper Training

Kathyria is a Research Program Coordinator at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, where she works on projects focusing on amelioration of disparities preventing access to culturally informed services. She has her dual master's degrees in health policy and management as well as health information from Temple University.

Cadence Pentheny

Reproductive Justice & Queer Bodies

Understanding & Affirming Asexual Identities

Cadence Pentheny (pronouns they/them/theirs) is Triangle Community Center's Community Education Director, and runs the LGBTQIA+ Training Institute. They hold a Bachelor's degree in Sociology and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from Franklin & Marshall College

and a Graduate Certificate in Human Sexuality through the University of Minnesota. Upon graduating, they served two years with the AmeriCorps program City Year, where they supported students in an under-resourced elementary school. Before joining the team at TCC, they worked as Coordinator for LGBTQ+ Programming & Initiatives at the University of Mississippi, doing a wide variety of work involving intersectionality, diversity, equity, and education, especially around LGBTQIA+ issues and sexual and gender justice. As Community Education Director, Cadence is responsible for engaging with the wider community to provide educational opportunities and professional development surrounding LGBTQIA+ cultural humility across Fairfield County, CT and beyond.

Rev. Joy Christi Przewor

Collaboration and how to build it both within and outside an organization

Rev. Joy Christi Przewor was born in South Bend, IN and has lived on both the East and West coasts of the United States for a decade each. She was a native of the North Carolina Mountains from 1992 through 2014. Rev. Joy Christi moved from NC to West Hartford in 2014 after retiring from a teaching career and remarrying after losing her first partner to breast cancer. Rev. Joy Christi retired from an educational career of over forty years in the classroom. She loved teaching and learning with her students. She has taught on all grade levels from primary school through graduate school. Rev. Joy Christi graduated from Harvard Divinity School in 1980. Rev. Joy Christi was ordained as a priest in the Liberal Catholic Faith in July 2012 by Bishop Carol Parrish-Harra and Monsignor Jesse Garnee at the Chapel of Christ Sophia in Tahlequah, OK. While studying for the priesthood, she also was a candidate for the Unitarian Universalist Ministry. Rev. Joy Christi was ordained as a Unitarian Universalist Minister in a dual ordination ceremony by the Asheville, NC congregation and the Universalist Congregation of West Hartford. Rev. Joy Christi is presently the Assistant Minister for Pastoral Care at the West Hartford Congregation where she has been since arriving in 2014. Rev. Joy Christi organized the second theological school gathering of LGBTQ ministerial candidates in this country at Harvard Divinity School and continues to be an ever present advocate for equality for all people in her continued civil rights, LGBTQ, senior citizen rights work, chaplaincy, and pastoral ministry.

Lisa Rodriguez-Ross

Thursday Keynote Panel

Lisa Rodriguez-Ross joined GLAD Law as a Staff Attorney in April 2024. Lisa is a dedicated legal attorney committed to advocating for her clients' rights. As the founder of Rodriguez-Ross Law, LLC, she brings a wealth of experience in Criminal Defense and Landlord Tenant Law. With a passion for social justice, Lisa was pivotal in establishing the Volunteers for Justice Program at the Hampden County Housing Court, demonstrating her commitment to serving her community.

Eliana Rubin

LGBTQ+ 101 in Your Classrooms

Eliana Rubin is a queer and trans educator and artist based in New York City. She aims to help people better understand themselves and the world around them, and is deeply grateful to do so through her work at Keshet. Prior to joining Keshet, Eliana worked at The Jewish Education Project as their Education Manager for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEI+B). Through her work, The Jewish Education Project reached over one thousand educators, fostering DEI+B actions and thought processes across the country. Eliana received her Master of Educational Leadership from Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, and her BFA in Drama from NYU / Tisch. Eliana is a musician and theatre maker. She intertwines her love of Jewish education with the arts through her original educational modality, Jewiscals (Jewish musicals), short musical numbers based around our sacred texts. She will never say no to a bag of movie theater popcorn.

Cheryl A. Sharp

Thursday Keynote Panel

She was appointed as the Deputy Director of the State of Connecticut, Commission on Human Rights on July 4, 2014, and serves as the second in command in the oldest governmental, civil rights agency in the nation. Prior to her appointment, she served as a litigation Attorney within the CHRO's legal department for over twenty years. She represents the state in the prosecution of complaints of discrimination before the CHRO's Office of Public Hearings and in state and federal court. She has argued before various Connecticut courts including appearances before the Connecticut Supreme Court and has negotiated millions of dollars in settlements between parties. She is a certified mediator. She represents the CHRO in the Connecticut Safe School's Coalition and the CT Racial Profiling Working Group. She is a member of the Commission on Racial & Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System. She was a sitting member on the legislative "Fair Housing Choice Impediments to Fair Housing" task force. She is responsible for organizing the agency's education and outreach programs and reporting the outreach efforts to a nine-member Commission. She is a trainer for the CHRO's Business Training Institute. She authored an article "Sweet Land of Liberty: The treatment of Muslims in CT through the Lens of the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities" which was published in 2012, by the University of Connecticut School of Law's Public Interest Law Journal.

Victor Simmons

Your Child Just Came Out — Now What? A Parent's Guide to Love, Learning, and Allyship.

Victor Simmons is an award-winning Human Resources executive, speaker, and inclusion strategist with more than two decades of experience shaping equitable workplace cultures across the hospitality and service industries. As the former Vice President of Human Resources and Head of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging for Atelier Ace—the creative studio behind the Ace Hotel brand—Victor led global people strategies that wove belonging into daily operations, leadership development, and guest experiences. His approach blends business acumen with heart, challenging leaders to see inclusion not as an initiative, but as a lived value that drives trust, retention, and performance. Victor is the founder of Victorious Endeavors, a leadership and culture consultancy that partners with organizations to strengthen inclusive leadership, transform team dynamics, and foster environments where authenticity and accountability coexist. Through keynote talks, workshops, and executive coaching, he helps individuals and organizations move from awareness to action—bridging the gap between intention and impact. What sets Victor apart as a speaker is his willingness to begin with his own story. In his workshops on allyship, he shares a deeply personal experience from his life as a father, when his teenage son came out and he was forced to confront how his values showed up at home compared to how they showed up at work. Though he had long been an advocate for LGBTQ+ inclusion as an HR leader, that moment illuminated the distance between understanding and empathy. He candidly recounts his missteps, the humility it took to listen and learn, and the evolution that followed—becoming an ally not only for gay colleagues but for the transgender community as well. That moment of reckoning now shapes much of Victor’s work with parents, leaders, and teams. Whether he’s speaking at corporate conferences, mentoring rising leaders, or leading parent workshops on affirming LGBTQ+ youth, Victor’s message remains consistent: empathy is a skill, allyship is a practice, and inclusion begins with one honest conversation at a time.

Rachel Simon

Building Your Rainbow Toolkit

Rachel Simon is the Executive Director of Triangle Community Center, Co-Chair of the Connecticut Justice & Opportunity Network, Chair of the Westchester County LGBTQ+ Advisory Board, Vice President of PrideWorks for Youth, and a dog person. Simon is a published poet and dog person who lives in the woods with their spouse.

Karen Soutullo

Staying Connected: Helping to build Mental Health, Resilience, and Relational Skills for LGBTQ+ Youth & their Caregivers

Karen Soutullo is a Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor Supervisor providing outpatient therapy to adult & adolescent individuals, groups, families, and partnered individuals. Her clinical expertise and experience includes diagnosis and treatment of those in different, and difficult walks of life including the LGBTQ+ community, those with experiences of complicated

trauma, grief, anxiety, depression, OCD, difficulties with emotional regulation, and personality disorders. She uses empirically supported methods of therapeutic interventions including Dialectic Behavioral Therapy (DBT), Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT), Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) therapy interventions with a foundation of person-centered therapy. Karen is native to Fayetteville/Fort Bragg area and values providing empirically-supported and culturally competent mental health care to those in her community.

TJ Sullivan

Essential Components and Principles of LGBTQ-affirmative Cognitive Behavior Therapy

Dr. TJ Sullivan (he/him) is a licensed clinical psychologist in New York State. He received his PhD in Clinical Psychology from Stony Brook University and completed his clinical internship at the VA Puget Sound Healthcare System in Seattle. He is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Yale LGBTQ Mental Health Initiative, housed in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Yale University School of Public Health, where he conducts research on the individual and interpersonal mechanisms underlying LGBTQ mental health disparities to inform intervention development and refinement. Dr. Sullivan has expertise in LGBTQ mental health, cognitive-behavior therapy, trauma-informed care, and couples therapy. He has served as a study therapist and clinical supervisor on multiple clinical trials of LGBTQ-affirmative CBT and conducted local and national trainings on LGBTQ-affirmative CBT.

Sophie Szew (she/they) Resisting (Dis)order and Reclaiming Neuroqueer Body Trust®

Sophie Szew (she/they) is a mental health justice activist, public speaker, poet, and the youngest appointee to the United States' federal government, having served as a National Advisory Council Member for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Sophie's activism is rooted in their lived experiences with institutionalization and systemic healthcare injustice, and it was recognized by Forbes 30 under 30 2025. Sophie began her activism by writing poetry from inside hospital walls, and her storytelling and calls to action for systemic mental healthcare justice have since made their way from spare pieces of notebook paper in the hospital into the White House—she shared her story with President Biden at the MTV Mental Health Youth Action Forum to advocate for comprehensive policies to address the use of harmful diagnostic algorithms in the American Healthcare system. She aims to illuminate pathways for youth communal care and intergenerational resilience partnerships to resist panicked crisis narratives and uplift agency. Her work around harm reduction on social media and its intersection with healthcare justice has been highlighted by the Today Show, the LA Times, NBC, CBS, and Spectrum News. Sophie also researches the intersection between disability critical race studies, eating disorders, mental health policy, and youth identity at Stanford University.

Cecil Tengtenga

Erased in Plain Sight: Safeguarding LGBTQ+ Curricular Integrity Amid Gender-Affirming Care Restrictions Through Narrative and Case-Based Pedagogy

Cecil Tengtenga is an Episcopal priest, university director, and implementation and translational scientist based in Farmington, Connecticut. He leads strategic initiatives in health professions education at UConn School of Medicine, focusing on curriculum innovation, workforce development, and health equity. His work bridges practical theology, bioethics, and narrative medicine with implementation science to advance inclusive care models. Cecil's research explores epistemic justice, psychospiritual identity formation, and translational approaches that integrate lived experience into clinical education and community-based interventions.

Nxt Thrdsy

Dreaming Together: Planning Youth Black Pride 2026

The Love That House Built: Education, Music, and Celebration for Black Queer Youth

NXT THRSY is a Hartford-based theatre director, producer, and arts leader with more than 20 years of experience in arts administration, social justice advocacy, and theatre production. He is the Founder and Lead Producer of the First Annual Hartford Black Pride, scheduled for July 24–26, 2026, a weekend focused on celebrating Black LGBTQ+ lives, culture, and community. In 2025, NXT became an alum of the Leadership Greater Hartford QUEST program, reflecting his commitment to leadership and community engagement. His work includes producing festivals, directing plays, mentoring emerging artists, and building platforms that highlight and support Black creativity. NXT earned a B.A. in African American Aesthetics, Theatre Directing, Production & Dance from Western Washington University and an M.F.A. in Arts Leadership from Seattle University. He also trained as a Fall Directing Fellow with The Drama League in New York City. Much of NXT's career was built in Seattle, Washington, where he directed and produced over 50 plays, concerts, and special events in mainstage theatres, cultural centers, outdoor venues, festivals, and experimental spaces. During this time, he also helped support and develop Seattle's Black theatre community, mentoring artists and producing work that centered Black stories. NXT approaches theatre and arts leadership with a focus on creating spaces where people feel seen and represented. He is committed to building inclusive programs and projects that amplify voices that are often underrepresented in the arts. Outside of his professional work, NXT enjoys dancing, listening to music, and reading, particularly works by Octavia E. Butler and Colson Whitehead. He embraces getting older and proudly identifies as an unabashed mama's boy. Now based in Hartford, NXT continues to direct, produce, and lead projects that serve the community. Hartford Black Pride is a reflection of his ongoing commitment to visibility, celebration, and empowerment for Black LGBTQ+ communities. Across his career, from Seattle stages to Hartford, NXT has consistently worked to create opportunities, support artists, and center Black voices and culture in the arts. NXT THRSY's career demonstrates a combination of artistic skill, leadership, and community commitment. He continues to focus on producing work

that matters, creating spaces for Black stories and artists, and fostering programs that support cultural growth and engagement.

Jimmy Tickey

Organizing to Win: The Art & Science of Running for Office

Blending political strategy with public service, Jimmy Tickey is the Vice Chair of the Connecticut Democratic Party where he leads candidate and grassroots trainings. A volunteer, campaign manager, elected official, party leader, and staff member to government officials, Jimmy understands firsthand where politics meets policy: organizing. First elected to local office at the age of 24 in the City of Shelton, where his electoral support broke records, Jimmy continues to be deeply involved in the Naugatuck Valley community, across the State of Connecticut, and through his service on the Democratic National Committee.

Salma Torres

Working with Rural LGBTQ+ Youth: Strategies to increase engagement and keep youth safe

As a queer Mexican, Salma intimately understands the difficulties of expressing queer identities while navigating spaces where that often is not easy. After receiving their Bachelor's at UC Santa Cruz, their education continued at UC Merced, where they witnessed disparities between access to resources across California. They developed a passion for resource equity in underserved rural communities. When not bringing about change, Salma can be found spending time with their dog, Littles.

Sara Townsend

Name It To Tame It: Identifying Bi+ Microaggressions & Self-Love In A World That Tries To Erase Us
The Erased Majority: How School Climates Impact Bi+ Youth

Sara Townsend is pursuing her PhD in School Psychology at the University of Arizona, having earned her MA in the same field in 2024. Her research investigates the relationship between sociocultural systems and identity development, mental health, and schooling experiences for bi+ populations, with a particular emphasis on adolescence. Clinically, Sara is specializing in LGBTQ+ affirming care, developmental trauma, and neurodivergence. She is active in advocacy within her field, using translational science to push for more socially-just systems in education and psychology. Prior to beginning her PhD, Sara had an impactful career supporting youth as an educator, program coordinator, evaluation professional, and policy developer. Her career has spanned two continents. Sara strongly values transdisciplinary thought and has an academic background in English Literature, Gender/Women's Studies, and Psychological Science. She is a Fulbright alum and has been a member of Phi Beta Kappa since 2012. When not working on her research or clinical training, Sara spends her time volunteering at an LGBTQ+ youth organization,

birding with her local Feminist Bird Club, searching for the best vegetarian tacos, and scouring the television for good bi+ representation.

Robyn Ventura-Chavez

Our Place Our Space: For LGBTQIA+ Folks Who are Neurodivergent and/or Disabled

Robyn (he/they) is a passionate Latinx/Black/Indigenous Queer Neurodivergent and Disabled educator working in the field of Special Education. He has experience speaking at events, including SOGIEcon True Colors events in the past, sharing their intersectional experiences as a queer neurodivergent disabled person of color.

Diane Verrochi

Journaling to Promote Health and Resilience

Diane Verrochi is a nurse educator at the University of Hartford. Verrochi is also a Reiki master-teacher and AAI/ISMA certified wellness coach and yoga instructor.

Serginho Walker

Our place, our space. Let's talk. Queer Folks who identify as Black or African American

Serginho S. Walker is a nationally certified licensed professional counselor in the state of Connecticut. His clinical practice focuses on members of the LGBTQ+ community and members of the Global Majority. Serginho will be obtaining his Doctorate from Southern Connecticut State University in May 2026. Serginho is a leader in the counseling profession, with service experiences including, Vice President of the Greater Hartford Alliance of Black Social Workers as well as Co-Chair at the National level on the Students and Emerging Leaders Committee and the National Nominating Committee. Serginho has presented locally, regionally, and nationally on issues related to historical trauma, sex and sexuality, and the unique mental health challenges of black queer men. Serginho's dissertation research examines how the intersection of non-binary identity, Blackness, and queer sexuality impacts experiences of stigma and mental health outcomes. Serginho brings a strong advocacy background through his involvement locally and nationally with the Greater Hartford Alliance of Black Social Workers as well as a general member of the ACA Society for Affectional, Intersex and Gender Expansive Identities (SAIGE) Committee, member of the ACA Association for Counseling Sexology and Sexual Wellness (ACSSW) committee, and National Board Certified Counselor Legislative Ambassador in the State of Connecticut. Serginho is a powerful force in the community and uses his positive attitude and tireless energy to encourage others to work hard and succeed.

Angela Weeks

Supporting Families of LGBTQ+ Youth

Introduction To AFFIRM Pro: A Different Way to Approach Workforce Change

Angela Weeks is a dedicated implementation specialist and the Director of the National SOGIE Center. Her work focuses on cultural adaptation, implementation science, and equity, particularly in the context of LGBTQ+ youth and their families involved in systems of care. She has focused most of her career on developing and evaluating programs and systems change efforts to build strategies that can be successfully replicated and scaled.

Aidan Whittel

Packers - STPs - Play Time: Alternatives to Phalloplasty

Aidan Whittel is a recently retired, 60 something, man of transgender experience who learned the hard way how to love himself and be a happy, healthy, intimate being. He has a masters degree in education, is a former middle and high school educator and has worked in the insurance industry. Aidan is a Board Member of MCC Hartford and on the leadership committee of TV365 (Transgender Voice and Visibility 365 days per year). He is also a member of the Imperial Sovereign Court of Connecticut. As a PRIDE ERG leader for his former employer and for the wider community, Aidan has developed and led programming, education and support for Transgender employees, those with Transgender family members and allies. Aidan spearheaded initiatives aimed at increasing awareness, and fostering empathy, through educational workshops, panel discussions, and storytelling events, Aidan brought to light the lived experiences of Transgender individuals, dismantling misconceptions and empowering employees to bring their whole selves to work. By bringing his true self to his work with TV365, Aidan is a part of a dynamic team that helps meet critical/basic needs of transgender/gender diverse individuals including: food, lodging, clothing, health-related needs, spiritual care, and providing referrals as necessary to partner agencies. Aidan helps facilitate name change clinics and develops resource lists to help mitigate the needs of the transgender community. Aidan's avocation is advocacy and education in the wider community centered around transgender and gender diverse individuals. He is an experienced facilitator of support groups, works one on one with individuals and offers workshops that discuss topics like: gender, diversity and the transgender community; allyship; marginalized communities; intimacy; and anti bias trainings. Aidan is currently working on a book that he wished he had as a young person that explores "Intimacy for Gender Diverse Individuals." Aidan has two married adult children, three grandsons, and recently became engaged to a beautiful transgender woman.

Jennifer Wisner

Signs of Support

Artist at Paintbar, parent of trans/queer people, former SPED teacher, homeschool parent

Emma Wynn

Queer Poetry Is Magic: A Writing Workshop

Emma Wynn teaches Philosophy, LGBTQI+ U.S. History, and Psychology at a boarding high school in CT. Their poetry has been nominated multiple times for the Pushcart Prize and published in a wide variety of places, including most recently in the magazines Beyond Queer Words, New Ohio Review, Oyster River Pages, and River Heron Review. Their first full-length book of poetry, "The World is Our Anchor," was a finalist for the Eyelands International Book Awards in 2023.

Spider Ze

Strong Voices, Safe Futures: Strategies to resist ICE

Queer Magic Class

Joy Is Not a Luxury: Collective Care within Hostile Systems

Spider (ze/zir) is a queer agender 1st generation Mexican born and raised in Chicago. Ze has been curious about healing practices since childhood, and as an adult decided to pursue Clinical Social Work as a career. Since 2014, ze has supported LGBTQIA2S+, BIPOC, disabled, and liberation-oriented people. Ze is also a Spiritual Leader who endeavors to connect people to Land-based magic in order to co-construct loving futures.