

WINDY CITY TIMES

17th annual 30 UNDER 30

HONORING THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST INDIVIDUALS IN
CHICAGO'S LGBTQIA+ YOUTH COMMUNITY

WED., JUNE 22, 5:30 PM RECEPTION/6-7:30 PM EVENT

POLO CAFE, 3322 S. MORGAN ST.

FREE EVENT. CATERING BY POLO CAFE & CATERING

HOSTED BY KIRK WILLIAMSON & JERRY NUNN

Windy City Times is proud to
welcome these co-sponsors:



Eric Amaya

Eric Amaya is 23-year-old Libra who has been involved in community work since his years in high school. He was involved in an organization called GenderJust, in which he and his peers protested Ron Huberman to make schools safer for all LGBTQ students. Eric also got into spreading the message of safe sex and empowering his community. He now works at CALOR, a division of Anixter Center where he provides free HIV testing. Outside of work, he is involved in the Youth Advisory Board for both ALMA and the IMPACT Program under Northwestern.

DID YOU KNOW? Recently, Eric coordinated this year's 11th annual Queer Prom at the National Museum of Mexican Art and is also a cast member of YouTube series called Queer Code.



Kim Chi

Kim Chi is a seven-foot-tall, live-action anime character and high-fashion model. Born in the U.S., raised in South Korea, and currently based in Chicago, Kim is a cultural hybrid with a preternatural understanding of style and conceptual fashion. One cannot bind Kim Chi with any stylistic stereotypes. She deftly absorbs and interprets our contemporary cultural milieu with unflinching focus. An ever-evolving chameleon, Kim never fails to surprise and delight with her larger than life looks and her high standard of work.

Kim's drag career started in November 2012. Joined by a team of creative visionaries, she quickly blossomed into a fixture of the Chicago drag scene. Kim started working with party-production company Neverland in 2012, becoming the Chicago-based party's main host.

Kim's work encapsulates the transcendental nature of drag, as the seemingly simple act of a man putting on a dress is transformed into fine art.

DID YOU KNOW? Kim has been invited to perform in numerous locations across the United States, including NYC, Boston, Providence, Texas, Iowa, Salt Lake City, the Wisconsin cities of Milwaukee and Madison, and Hawaii.



Maxx Boykin

Maxx Boykin, 26, is the community organizer for AIDS Foundation of Chicago, new manager of the HIV Preventive Justice Alliance and organizing co-chair of the Chicago chapter of Black Youth Project 100 and is on the steering committee for the Collaboration on Health Equity for Cook County. His organizing includes direct action, civic engagement, conscience-raising and coalition-building.

Originally from the suburbs of Atlanta, Maxx, along with his two sisters, were raised by his parents who came from Alabama during the Civil Rights Movement. He has been an organizer for a wide range of issue-based political and union organizing. His first 2 years were in political organizing, starting in Savannah, Georgia, on local campaigns, later moving to Virginia to work on four winning campaigns, including gubernatorial and presidential races.

In Illinois, he has worked on the Fight for 15 campaign and the Get Covered America Campaign around health insurance before finding a home at the AIDS Foundation of Chicago. He has always worked in primarily Black and marginalized communities and loves working with his people in order to make sure they are uplifted and liberated.

DID YOU KNOW? Maxx loves rugby—so much so that he's played with and against guys on the U.S. national team.

Greg Cox

Greg Cox, 26, is originally from Germantown, Wisconsin, but has been living in Chicago for the past four years. He moved to the city for graduate school at Loyola University Chicago and obtained his masters degree in social work. His training has ultimately led him to become a therapist, with specific focuses on the intersections of LGBTQ populations and addiction.

He currently works for New Hope Recovery Center, located in the Lake View neighborhood, and the Chapman Center, located in Evanston. As part of the New Hope with Pride program, Greg is always busy providing safe spaces for LGBTQ clients to share their stories and find connections. This takes place in facilitating intensive outpatient groups, individual therapy, family seminars, couples sessions and weekly support groups. He can also be found presenting at local conferences advocating for the LGBTQ community, such as the Chicago Round-Up, the Loyola Q-Summit and the Equality Illinois Conference. When he's not hard at work, Greg enjoys family time, playing tennis, watching football and painting.

DID YOU KNOW? Greg's favorite artist, Stevie Nicks, sent him an autograph in the mail.



Aisha N. Davis, Esq.

Aisha N. Davis, Esq. was born in Washington, D.C., and raised in Maryland. After attending Washington & Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, she went on to Columbia Law School and the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies for her JD and LLM, respectively.

As an avid student of intersectionality, Aisha has worked on civil-rights issues throughout her legal career, including work with Amnesty International, the Human Rights Foundation, Columbia Law School's Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, and the African American Policy Forum. Since her move to Chicago, Aisha has continued this mission through her fellowship with Lambda Legal as well as work with Affinity Community Services and the Pride Action Tank.

DID YOU KNOW? Aisha is proud to count herself in many sci-fi/fantasy/comic fandoms. It's Marvel > DC and Star Trek > Star Wars.

Benjamin Di'Costa

Benjamin Di'Costa, 25, is a new resident of Chicago, relocating here from the epicenter of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Miami, Florida, where, for many years, Benjamin has demonstrated great passion, professionalism, and commitment to many organizations and causes that support the youth movement in HIV/AIDS. Benjamin has organized several campus and community events to educate peers about sexual and reproductive health and rights issues, such as HIV/AIDS, sexual violence, sexuality and healthy relationships. In an effort to educate and empower his peers, Benjamin has written published articles and remained a social-media figure on health equity and the impact of health disparities among young people. He has represented Chicago at conference and youth forums hosted by many prestigious national and international organizations.

He recently was awarded the prestigious 2016 Honor41 award, highlighting him as top leader in the LGBT Latin@ community, and was included as one of "15 HIV Advocates to Watch in 2015".

DID YOU KNOW? Benjamin is a self-taught musician playing the piano and guitar by ear from the age of 17.



Parks Dunlap

Parks Dunlap (pronouns: she/her & they/them) is a Southern lesbian and power Libra who is dedicated to the messy process of advocating for queer wellness. After graduating from Smith College, Parks moved to Chicago to be with her best friends and continue her career in public health.

They currently work at the Center on Halsted as the advocacy coordinator. In under a year, she built and implemented the Center's first medical-advocacy program, prioritizing youth and HIV-positive individuals. Parks is contributing to research through DePaul University studying marijuana use in HIV-positive youth who are experiencing homelessness. Describing herself as a "professional sidekick," Parks aims to use her privilege and access to resources to help others.

She has volunteered in queer and women's archives, libraries, and museums for the last six years. In Chicago, she volunteers at the Leather Archives & Museum as an archival assistant and researcher. They headed the updates to the trans history exhibit, and is currently restoring her great grandfather's WWII bomber jacket.

She comes to the field with a strong background in violence prevention and women's health. Some recognizable names on her resume include Planned Parenthood, The Center for Sex and Culture, Sex Workers Outreach Project, Rape Victim Advocates, and Hamilton Family Center.

Parks hopes to begin her Ph.D. in public health in 2017, and to be a stay at home dad/mom someday.

DID YOU KNOW? Parks is a mixed-media artist, and spends her weekends baking bread, caring for plants, and reading on her porch.



Brittany Ellenberg

Brittany Ellenberg grew up in La Porte, Texas. She transformed her experience with small-town prejudice into a passion for social equality for the LGBTQ community. Brittany attended the University of Texas at Dallas, graduating summa cum laude with a degree in political science. She created the university's first Diversity Council, a forum for improving diversity and inclusion on campus. Brittany also served as political liaison for PRIDE. After founding the University's College Democrats chapter, Brittany was appointed vice chair of the LGBT Caucus for the national organization, College Democrats of America.

While completing her B.A., Brittany travelled to developing countries, conducting international human-rights research and providing aid to indigenous, refugee and LGBT populations in Costa Rica, Peru, Jamaica and Thailand. In 2013, Brittany received the Archer Fellowship to work for the U.S. Department of State, where she served on the LGBT task force, confronting situations of LGBT discrimination in the Middle East and North Africa.

Brittany is currently a student at the University of Chicago Law School, where she was the events coordinator for OutLaw and on the Executive Board of the Lesbian and Gay Bar Association of Chicago. Jenner & Block named her the 2014 Grant Folland Scholar for her commitment to LGBT civil rights. She is also a Point Scholar as part of the nation's largest LGBTQ scholarship program.

DID YOU KNOW? Brittany can be regularly found scoping out the best coffee shops in Chicago—all on her bright red, vintage Schwinn bicycle that she loves spending time fixing up on the weekends.



Alfredo Flores

Alfredo Flores is a proud 21-year-old queer Mexican-American who was born and raised in the La Villita neighborhood of Chicago. Alfredo attends Harold Washington College and is pursuing a career in public health.

During his years at Curie Metropolitan High School, Alfredo volunteered at a local community organization called Project VIDA. He became a core group member of the program called Committed Responsible United (CRU). CRU was an empowerment program that guided his passion for HIV prevention. During that time, he also acted in the About Face production of What's the T?, a play that explored queer youth space and trans-identity in Chicago.

In 2014, Alfredo became certified to provide HIV testing and counseling at CALOR. Through the same agency, Alfredo also became the empowerment facilitator the CALOR program called Advocating for Community Empowerment (A.C.E). Early in 2015, Alfredo was selected for The Association of Latinos/as Motivating Action (ALMA) Creating Change Scholarship; that scholarship offered an opportunity to attend the Creating Change Conference in February 2015.

Currently, Alfredo continues to provide HIV testing and hosts monthly safe-sex discussions. Alfredo is also a member of the Chicago Area HIV Integrated Services Council (CAHISC). Not only is Alfredo's work in the Chicago area, but he is also featured in Act Against AIDS' national campaign "Doing It," which encourages youth to get tested. He is featured all around the United States and currently has a billboard in New York's Times Square.

DID YOU KNOW? Alfredo created a YouTube Web series called QueerCode that featured some of Chicago's queer folks addressing topics that affect the LGBT community. Alfredo is currently working on the return of QueerCode this fall.

Liz Franco

Liz Franco, 29, went to high school in Madison, Wisconsin, before starting college. As a freshman in college, Liz started volunteering at health centers that performed abortions, which showed them that health care can be a form of activism. Liz continued to work with abortion care after graduating from nursing school in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and, eventually, Chicago. In the fall of 2012, Liz started at Howard Brown Health, realizing their dream of working with trans and gender non-conforming people, something that was nonexistent in their experience in Oklahoma, and that would have made a huge difference in their life as a young queer person. While at Howard Brown, Liz has worked primarily at the Broadway Youth Center (BYC) and focused on providing low barrier medical services like HIV/STI treatment, PrEP, hormones and birth control to LGBTQ youth and youth experiencing housing instability.

Liz strives to provide services that are trauma-informed and based in harm-reduction principals. Liz is going back to school this fall and plans to continue to provide community healthcare with a focus on increasing services to TGNC people as a nurse practitioner.

DID YOU KNOW? Liz was a long-distance swimmer in high school and college.



Yanina Guevara

Born and raised on the North Side of Chicago, Yanina Guevara, 26, is a queer, gender non-conforming, brown social-justice advocate. She graduated from DePaul University as a Posse Scholar and received a bachelor's in anthropology. Through the support of friends and her community, she came out as queer toward the beginning of her senior year, even though she grew up in an evangelical Christian home.

She is a member of Salud sin Papeles, an undocumented-led collective that organizes to improve health and access to healthcare for undocumented immigrants, their families and their communities.

She currently works as the research study coordinator for the Cancer Survivorship Institute at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine where she is working on developing a mobile application that provides comprehensive follow-up care to cancer survivors. She plans to apply to medical school where she wants to work with uninsured, undocumented and LGBTQ communities to help them gain access to health care.

DID YOU KNOW? Yanina taught herself to play 5 different musical instruments and loves to sing. One day she hopes to create an independent album.

Andrew Fortman

Andrew Fortman, 30, hails from the Buckeye State and finds himself in Chicago via The Big Apple and beautiful Virginia. He attended The Ohio State University and the University of Virginia, earning bachelor's and master's degrees in theater, and has performed as a professional actor in several productions. He currently resides with his husband in Andersonville, where they can be found on most nights walking around with an iced coffee in hand.

Andrew was first hired at Center on Halsted as the cultural programs manager and has since stepped into the role of director of community and cultural programs. In that role, he supports a successful GED prep and testing program and an array of community-led affinity groups and curates events that address the wide array of identities within the LGBTQ communities. Most recently, he has created two new monthly programs at the Center: The Limelight Series (which highlights LGBTQ performance artists throughout Chicagoland) and Center on Halsted Chats (an evening of conversation with local LGBTQ leaders about pressing topics).

DID YOU KNOW? Andrew is an enormous (ENORMOUS!) sports fan but doesn't care much for the NBA or NFL. (Sorry, Bulls and Bears fans!)



Kate Harrington-Rosen

Kate Harrington-Rosen (she/her), 27, moved to Chicago in February 2015. She manages the TransWorks Employment Program at Chicago House, where she is honored to put her allyship into practice every day serving alongside trans and gender non-conforming communities across the city. Kate grew up outside of Boston, and bounced around to Montreal, Quebec, and Portland, Oregon, before landing in Chicago last year. Kate is the co-creator of The Not Sorry Project, a community-driven art project that seeks to dismantle the idea that any of us need to apologize for who or how we are.

DID YOU KNOW? Kate planted a garden on her back porch this year, and gets a ridiculous amount of joy from eating basil that she grew herself.



Luther Hughes

Luther Hughes, born in Seattle, Washington, received his bachelor of arts in poetry from Columbia College Chicago. While at Columbia, Luther, 25, founded Shade, a literary blog for queer writers of color. Shade's mission to educate members standing in solidarity and against the queer community through various literary forms; through exposure, teaching others that literary works by queer people of color are just as fundamental as the works of white heterosexual men. This past semester, Luther was the first openly queer Black student body president at Columbia, sitting on different campus-wide committees such as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; the Sexual Assault Awareness Education Committee; and the New Student Registration and Orientation Committee, voicing the serious concerns of students across campus. In addition, he is the associate poetry editor for The Offing Magazine, an online literary journal focused on giving back the power to marginalized voices. Luther will continue his education in the master's writing program at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, this fall, enhancing his craft, drive and education.

DID YOU KNOW? Luther is obsessed with cookies. If you have cookies around him, it is only right that you give him some.



Forrest Marie Peters Linsell

Forrest Marie Peters Linsell, 23, was born in Chicagoland, and grew-up in Morton Grove, Illinois. A year ago, Forrest Marie graduated from Knox College, and recently joined the staff at Center on Halsted, providing reception, administrative and youth staff support as needed to empower her colleagues to fully serve our communities. She was first recognized with the Ivy Lynn Chaplik Humanitarian Award in 2011 for organizing and leading 200 of her high school peers in a peaceful protest to celebrate diversity in the face of Westboro Baptist Church members who picketed her school. Forrest Marie is a lifelong Unitarian Universalist, a faith tradition that actively affirms all LGBTQIA people, and has been a youth worship coordinator at youth retreats for junior high, high school, and young adult interfaith communities in Chicagoland and throughout the nation.

During college, Forrest Marie came out as a transgender woman, and was an integral leader of an intersectional student political coalition that engaged in direct action. She also completed facilitator training in InterGroup Dialogue conflict transformation, a ground-breaking method of collaborative growth and change-making that she uses in her communities on a regular basis. Most recently, she was a member of a coalition that demonstrated against the men's rights activists gathering in Rogers Park, and proudly marched in the 2015 Chicago Gay Pride Parade.

DID YOU KNOW? Forrest Marie's favorite animal is the milipede. She has a spiritual connection with these many-legged friends!



Ali Hoefnagel



Ali Hoefnagel (Pronouns: They/Them/Theirs), 30, is a performer, arts administrator and teaching artist based in Chicago. As an artist and educator, they embrace the complexity of the queer identity to create new and engaging ways to explore LGBTQIA life within Chicago communities. Ali serves as the education and outreach director at About Face Theatre Company, where they directed Checking Boxes and 15 Breaths, and is currently directing the world premiere of Ad Hoc [Home] for About Face Youth Theatre.

Ali was a Chicago Artist Month-featured artist in 2014 and has been a teaching artist with Step-pewolf For Young Adults program for several years. They are a regular performer at Pride Films & Play's LezFest series and their weird solo work has been seen in several places around Chicago. In addition, Ali is a member of The Pride Youth Theatre Alliance, a cohort of activists representing Queer Youth Theater programs from across the United States and Canada. They have taught theater-activism classes and workshops with numerous organizations and universities in Illinois, including Illinois State University, Columbia College, University of Illinois at Chicago and Lake Forest College, where they hold a B.A. in theater and women's & gender studies.

DID YOU KNOW? You should talk to Ali about the band Sleater-Kinney; they sport a Sleater-Kinney tattoo and traveled to five different states to see them play live eight times in the last year.

Kara Ingelhart

Kara Ingelhart was born and raised in Indiana. While attending Indiana University, she was part of a research team at The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Sexuality and worked as a local Community Educator. After graduating with a degree in gender studies and biology, she moved to Chicago in 2012 to attend the University of Chicago Law School.

Despite the law school's conservative reputation, Kara was able to find a supportive network of queer and allied classmates through Outlaw and crafted her class curriculum to prepare her for a career in LGBTQ advocacy. She also used her Outlaw presidency as a platform to educate her classmates on a range of LGBTQ issues from the blood ban to trans-rights issues. Through a certificate program, the Graduate Program in Health Administration and Policy, she advocated for open military service for transgender service people with the Center for Interdisciplinary Inquiry and Innovation in Sexual and Reproductive Health at University of Chicago Medicine and traveled to Nepal to research police inflicted violence upon the transgender population in Kathmandu.

During law school, Kara was a legal intern at Lambda Legal and she is grateful to be back there through her Skadden Fellowship, serving some of the most vulnerable members of our community—LGBTQ youth with juvenile and criminal records—by addressing the collateral effects of those records. Kara is proud to be a part of an organization working to make her home state a safer and more accepting place for young LGBTQ Hoosiers.

DID YOU KNOW? Kara's favorite place in the world is New Delhi, India—the chaos is soothing.



Elijah McKinnon

Elijah McKinnon, 24, was born in Oakland, California, and raised all over the San Francisco Bay area. Following their graduation from The Art Institute of San Francisco, Elijah traded in their comfortable life in California for a creative nomadic lifestyle. After living and being inspired by cities including Portland, Brooklyn and Montreal, a freshly 'fed up with consulting on projects in the commercial industry' Elijah, relocated to Chicago in January 2015.

It was Elijah's commitment to working exclusively with nonprofits and grassroots initiatives that led to their acceptance of a position at the AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC) in March 2015. In this role, they helped develop the digital communications coordinator position, a completely new role for the agency. During their employment at AFC, they spearheaded the creation of Chicago's PrEP4Love campaign, which brought Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) riders' attention to same-gender-loving couples "spreading tingle" with each other. As a gender-non-conforming Black queer person, Elijah has deeply enriched the sharing of different perspectives on gay sex, online dating apps and HIV through their "What to say // what not to say" series for AFC's blog.

Elijah also recently directed and produced Two Queens in a Kitchen, Open TV -Beta's turn-to-relevance cooking series premiering this summer that examines the Black queer experience through food, lifestyle and personal anecdotes. They are constantly moving and shaking in an attempt to build meaningful relationships and encourage resource sharing. In addition to their professional credits, Elijah currently holds a seat on the board of I Paint My Mind, volunteers at Creative Mornings Chicago, hosts and curates Canvas Primer, is a member of BYP100 Chicago and serves as the head of marketing and design for Open TV-Beta.

DID YOU KNOW? Elijah recently attended the African American LGBTQ Summit on Education at the White House and the Young Black Gay Leadership Initiative.

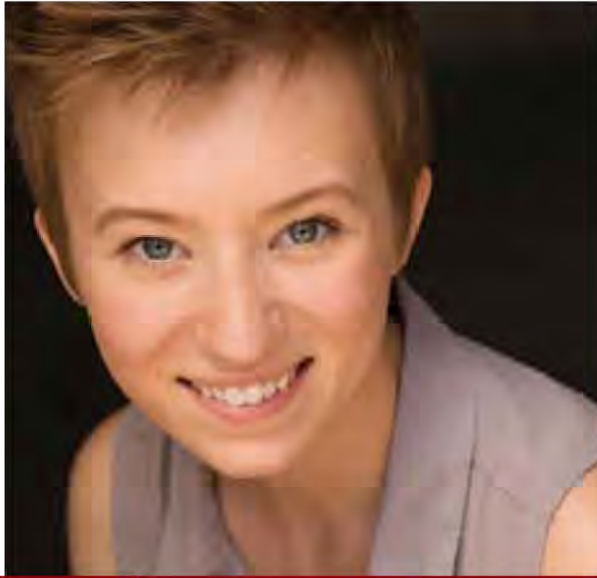


Meredith Montgomery

Meredith Montgomery, 27, is the co-founder of {she crew}, a feminist arts-empowerment non-profit organization for middle-school girls in Chicago. The program combines cooking, writing and performing to instill higher confidence, independence and a secure sense of self to girls from all over Chicago at perhaps the most awkward, self-critical and formative part of their young lives. The program's journaling-to-performance method was created by Meredith while an undergrad at St. Edward's University, to which her school awarded her a prestigious Brown Scholarship, as well as turned her method into a freshman required course. {she crew} is an equal access program, with free tuition, transit cards and free meals, and is, of course, lesbian-, bi- and trans-inclusive. The program incorporates issues of gender and intersectional oppression along with universal issues of this age group, like body image, shyness, and the creation of positive female relationships.

Meredith Montgomery runs {she crew} with her fiancée, Jessica, and the two have valued the support given to them and their organization by the LGBTQ community.

DID YOU KNOW? In addition to {she crew}, Meredith is a very talented cook and visual artist. Also, she discovered a T. rex fossil when she was 7 while trying to find a place to pee in the desert. #bath-roompolitics #letmypeoplepee



Darlene Nava Muñoz, aka Mika Muñoz

Darlene Nava Muñoz, aka Mika Muñoz, is a 29-year-old Xicana from Chicago who's a sex-positive burlesque dancer by night and a union welder by day. Graduating in 2009 from the University of Illinois at Chicago with a major in gender and women's studies and a double minor in Latin American and Latino studies and African-American studies. A retired Chicago Dyke March organizer, co-founder of Ella's Daughter's, co-founder of Brown and Proud Press, co-founder of Brown People for Black Power, and co-founder of Color Queer Kinksters, her activism ranges from writing and creating zines to amplifying and centering the experiences of queer people of color, conducting workshops in Spanish to combat anti-Black racism within non-Black Latinx communities and participating in direct actions to protest police brutality.

In her most recent work, she was the on the national planning committee and was a volunteer coordinator of the successful 20th annual three-day National Women in Building Trades conference, the largest convergence of tradeswomen in North America.

Mika loves nature; traveling; her family (chosen and biological) and her life companion, Zapata the Chihuahua. She also enjoys doing hard femme things like helping other femmes change their oil or tires on their cars, and wants to build a solar power generator very soon.

DID YOU KNOW? Mika lived in Sao Paulo, Brazil for eight months and speaks conversational Portuguese.



Joe Olszewski

Joe Olszewski, 29, was raised in central New York and is proud to call Chicago home. After attending Syracuse University, Joe joined Teach For America, where he taught fifth grade in Baltimore, Maryland. During his time in the classroom, he began to understand the unique perspective and influence an LGBTQ educator brings to the classroom.

Upon completing his masters at Johns Hopkins University, Joe worked in various roles in education and moved to Chicago in 2013. Since then, Joe has worked with LG-BTQA teachers in providing spaces that help to build community and address the many challenges that LGBTQ teachers face in the classroom. Additionally, Joe helped to design programming that provides teachers of all backgrounds clear strategies of how to set up safe classrooms in their schools. Joe is continuing to work with both educators and students to expand LGBTQ issues, in the hope that both teachers and students can feel safe and accepted in our public education system.

DID YOU KNOW? Joe's an avid Syracuse basketball fan—"Go Orange!"



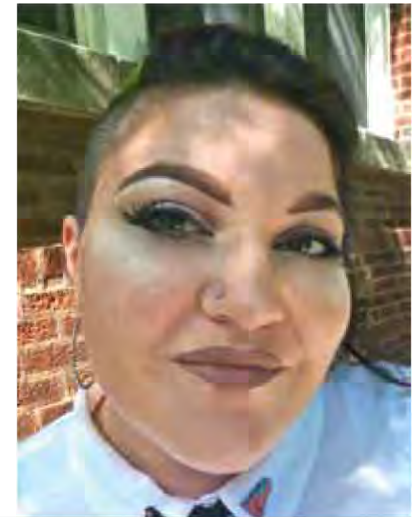
Maria Pahl

Maria Pahl grew up in Midland, Michigan, before attending the University of Michigan for her BA. She came to Chicago in 2010 to attend DePaul College of Law, where she subsequently served as the Vice President of OUTLaws (the LGBT law student organization) and the editor-in-chief of the DePaul Journal of Women, Gender & the Law, the only academic legal journal in Illinois dedicated to issues surrounding gender in the law. As a senior law student, she was a clerk for the public defender's office at the felony trial level. Maria graduated cum laude from DePaul College of Law in 2013 and spent her first year of practice at the Law Offices of Barry Schultz specializing in representing disabled plaintiffs who had been wrongfully denied Social Security benefits. She has also served as a volunteer attorney with the Transformative Justice Law Project of Illinois since 2013.

In January 2015, Maria became the legal director and staff attorney of the TransLife Center Chicago House. In her position, Maria aids members of the trans and gender non-conforming community in updating their identity documents (gender and name change), accessing public benefits, becoming involved in misdemeanor criminal defense, sealing criminal records and addressing discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations.

Maria also does policy and advocacy work surrounding transgender legal issues and provides continuing legal education (CLE) trainings for Illinois attorneys and judges on the ways the legal system marginalizes and traumatizes trans and gender non-conforming individuals. Maria hopes to expand the TransLegal program to provide more desperately needed pro bono legal services for trans and gender non-conforming clients.

DID YOU KNOW? Maria is a karaoke diva and was crowned Windy City Gay Idol in 2013.



Christopher Pazdernik

Christopher Pazdernik, 29, an HIV+ director/choreographer, was born and raised in northeastern Wisconsin. During high school and college, he began both his AIDS advocacy volunteering for the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin and his theatrical career directing and choreographing for summer stock theaters. Since moving to Chicago in 2008, he has worked with companies such as Bailiwick Repertory, Bailiwick Chicago, Hell in a Handbag, Davenport's, Stage 773, Chicago Commercial Collective and Porchlight Music Theatre, where he is a proud artistic associate, and more than five years in administration at Chicago Shakespeare. His work has garnered both Jeff Award and Broadway World Award nominations and New City Stage credited him with "a near-encyclopedia knowledge of musicals."

In response to his HIV-positive diagnosis, he founded Chris' Birthday Belt Fest, an annual benefit concert for Howard Brown Health. For multiple years, he has also been a team captain for the AIDS Run/Walk Chicago, and this year serves on the Ambassador Committee through the AIDS Foundation of Chicago. Currently, his artistic work can be seen as director/choreographer of Make Me a Song with Eclectic, performing at the Athanaeum through July 10, and he encourages everyone to sign up for this year's AIDS Run/Walk at www.AIDSrun-walk.org!

DID YOU KNOW? Christopher drinks iced coffee year round—even in the coldest Chicago winters!



Photo by Assaf Evron



Tess Raser

Tess Raser, 26, an abolitionist originally from Chicago, attended Brandeis University, and then spent three years living in New York, where she completed her masters in education, taught kindergarten and organized against anti-blackness alongside families who had lost members to police violence. In 2015, Tess returned home to Chicago to teach fifth-grade reading. She jumped right into organizing with Assata's Daughters, an intergenerational collective of Blk womyn and girls.

Tess heads the curriculum team in Assata's, helping to create a program structure and curriculum that seeks to give young people political education and empowerment needed in movement building. Tess, a leader in the final push of the ByeAnita campaign, also participates and leads direct actions throughout the city. In all of her work, she hopes to inspire and prepare young people to lead and organize because she believes that young Black people are the vanguards of change and revolution.

DID YOU KNOW? Tess speaks almost fluent Italian and has spent a lot of time living and traveling in Sicily. She loves Sicilian food and, if you ask nicely, she'd probably cook some for you.



Keisa Reynolds

Keisa Reynolds, 24, grew up in Richmond, California, and moved to Chicago in 2011 to hang out with their friends from Livejournal and study at Columbia College, where they earned their BA in cultural studies and a minor in education. They are a queer Black feminist, writer and storyteller whose work can be found Hooligan Mag, Richmond Pulse and In These Times. They host Wednesday Whine Club, a monthly reading series for women and gender non-conforming people who love writing, whining, and drinking wine.

Currently, Keisa works in the Women's Leadership and Resource Center at UIC and volunteers with Bay Area Women Against Rape. They are a former organizer with We Charge Genocide and volunteered with Rape Victim Advocates as well as other non-profit organizations in Chicago and San Francisco Bay Area. A certified rape-crisis counselor and prevention educator, Keisa also facilitates conversations and organizes around transformative justice and community accountability for those harmed by interpersonal violence.

DID YOU KNOW? They hosted a Buffy the Vampire Slayer, prom-themed party for their 21st birthday. Of course, they were dressed as Buffy (though they have mad love for Kendra Young).



Nathan Stevens

Nathan Stevens, 29, is a pure Midwestern gentleman who grew up all over Michigan and Ohio and has been calling Chicago his home for nearly a decade. Nathan graduated magna cum laude with his bachelor's degree in media arts from Columbia College Chicago. It was there that Nathan won first place in the 2009 Written Image Awards for his feature script The Lonely Parts.

Since graduation, Nathan truly found his career calling in the non-profit sector. Previously, Nathan has held roles at the Columbia Summer Arts Camp, a unique camp program for ages 6-15 that allows campers to explore the visual, performing and media arts. He also spent 16 months at Center on Halsted, where he provided C-level executive support and was the organization's board liaison. Nathan's proudest accomplishment at the Center was the integrated key role he played in the implementation and launch of the Town Hall Apartments, one of the nation's largest affordable housing facilities dedicated to the LGBTQ senior citizens of Chicago.

Currently, Nathan can be found 40+ hours a week at 10,000 Small Businesses, a program dedicated to growing the small business and non-profit economy in Chicagoland. When he's not at work, Nathan's enjoying his time playing beach volleyball, watching Bob's Burgers, and traveling all over the country with his admirable and inspiring partner, whom he loves very much.

DID YOU KNOW? Nathan used to skip football practice to watch Guiding Light with his mother.

Nelson Rodriguez

Nelson Rodriguez (he/him/his), 30, is a Chicago-based actor and writer of Puerto Rican descent. As an actor, his credits include Steppenwolf Theatre Company, 16th Street Theatre, Chicago Dramatists, Adventure Stage Chicago (where he is an associate artist) and many others. He is an artistic associate of Pride Films and Plays, where he appeared in The Boys Upstairs, Some Men (for which he received a 2015 BroadwayWorld Chicago nomination for Best Actor) and Men on the Verge of a His-Panic Breakdown, for which he received a 2016 Joseph Jefferson Award nomination for Solo Performance. On camera, he has appeared in the Chicago-based LGBTQ+ webseries Easy Abby, Kissing Walls and Dudes, and has a principal role in the upcoming SAG feature film En Algun Lugar.

As a playwright, he is a member of The Alliance of Latino Theatre Artists' playwrights circle: El Semillero. His play Snapshots received a public reading at Victory Gardens in spring 2015 and will be featured this summer at Chicago Cultural Center as part of Spartan Workshop. Nelson holds an MFA in acting from The University of Southern Mississippi and a BA in theater from Brenau University, which is near his hometown in northeast Georgia.

DID YOU KNOW? Nelson has three obsessions—vegan eats, Jake Gyllenhaal and his cat, Ralphie.



Joey Wasserman

In a city known for fabulous restaurants and a passion for social justice, it's no wonder why Joey Wasserman, 29, decided to relocate to Chicago to manage one of the city's largest campaigns, raising awareness and support for those impacted by HIV/AIDS with Dining Out for Life (DOFL). Annually, Dining Out for Life brings out more than 9,000 supporters to over 80 restaurants for good food, fabulous drinks and a good cause.

As a political fundraiser, activist and community organizer, Joey has dedicated his career to engaging and empowering the public. While managing DOFL Chicago during 2013-15, Joey also volunteered in the SAGECenter at the Center on Halsted on Saturday afternoons, serving lunch and spending time with our LGBT older pioneers. Since then, Joey has taken a position with SAGE National, Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders, orchestrating community engagement events in Chicago and across the country in support of LGBT older Americans.

DID YOU KNOW? A native of Philadelphia, Joey's family's restaurant was one of the first to participate in Dining Out for Life.



Arianna Salgado

Arianna Salgado, 24, is an undocumented and queer woman who was born in Morelos, Mexico. She crossed the Mexico/ U.S. border at the age of 6, landed in Chicago and later relocated to the west suburbs. She began organizing in high school with the West Suburban Action Project Nuestra Voz, and the Immigrant Youth Justice League—undocumented-led organizations that sought to create safe spaces for undocumented people and resources for higher education.

Arianna currently works with Organized Communities Against Deportations, a grassroots organization that fights against the detention and deportation of undocumented people. She has helped organized several direct actions including the recent Defund Police, Dismantle ICE action that called for an end to all raids and the defunding of the police. She recently joined People's Response Team and is excited to continue to build on ways in which as community folk can respond to, document, and investigate fatal police shootings.

She currently works as a paralegal at the West Suburban Action Project and is super-excited to be back at the organization that helped politicized her and introduced her to the magic of people power.

DID YOU KNOW? Arianna was part of her high school's robotics team, called the Monty Pythons.



Liz Weck

Liz Weck, 30 was born and raised in the Rogers Park neighborhood on Chicago's North Side. She is a social worker, advocate and educator, who's work focuses on various facets of LGBTQ Health including street-based youth, survivors of violence, HIV care, and Trans* health, specifically in regards to barriers faced in accessing comprehensive, non-judgmental health care.

Recently, Liz was named the director of social services at Howard Brown Health, where she previously held the title of program manager for Ryan White Part C and D. Currently, she oversees case management, linkage-to-care, and retention programming across all four of Howard Brown's locations, including the recently opened clinic on 63rd Street in Englewood. She has trained locally and nationally on issues related to LGBTQ identity including, harm reduction, sex positivity, and trans* competence in medical settings.

Liz also volunteers with The Center on Halsted's Friendly Visitor Program, which provides companionship to isolated LGBTQ adults, and, on occasion, you can find her behind the bar at Big Chicks, the uptown bar she has worked on and off for the past 10 years. Prior to Howard Brown, Liz was the LGBTQ outreach coordinator for the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, where she received her master's in social work.

DID YOU KNOW? In her spare time Liz loves making crafts. In addition, she recently completed a series of baby onesies depicting famous lesbians throughout history.