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#### LGBTQ TA CENTER

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# Winter 2023

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## The Work Continues: Honoring Our LGBTQ+ Elders

Hello again from the LGBTQ TA Center!

It's been an eventful few months for our community, full of reflection, transition, and transformation.

But then, this time of year is always marked by change. Even here in "sunny" California, the air chills and the light softens. As we move towards the winter solstice, the days get shorter and the trees shed their leaves. Our community comes together to raise awareness, mourn, and remember, as we <u>celebrate the lives of trans folx</u> whose stories were cut short as an effect of anti-trans violence. In winter, transitions can challenge us, but they also remind us to pause and listen; to reflect on the past and imagine new possibilities for our present.

In our fall newsletter, you heard from San Joaquin Pride Center's own James Patnaude about the multigenerational nature of our work. We continue to explore and expand on that thread in our winter edition, with **an interview** featuring J Jha, Manager of TGNC and Intergenerational Programs at San Francisco's Openhouse. They share their thoughts on the importance of building and sustaining intergenerational ties within the LGBTQ+ community.

We are so excited to share their amazing work with you, and we hope these stories and updates from our community can help inspire and energize you as you move into the new year.





# Winter Grantee Spotlight Openhouse

The LGBTQ TA Center provides no-cost technical assistance and training to seven organizations to support their phenomenal work with LGBTQ+ communities. We want to take this opportunity to showcase another one of our fantastic grantees! Openhouse is a community-based organization dedicated to serving LGBTQ+ older adults in the San Francisco Bay Area.

## Introducing, J Jha!

J Jha (they/them) manages TGNC and intergenerational programs at Openhouse.

Last month, the LGBTQ TA Center Team had the opportunity to interview J and learn more about what inspires and challenges them about their work.

#### How would you describe your role at Openhouse?

I am the manager of transgender and gender nonconforming programs, and I'm part of the community engagement programming department, which is headed by Sylvia Vargas. I am primarily responsible for ending social isolation, fostering community, nourishment, and partnering with our community members to allow their agency in doing the things in life that they want to do, whether it is through access to ride-share services or organizing programming, like a date at the symphony or a visit to the Salesforce Tower.



#### What inspired you to begin working with Openhouse?

I got my green card in August of 2019, and that changed my sense of security; of who I am and where I am, and how permanent my status is in this country, which allows you to expand from the perspective of fear to the threshold of gratitude. And so, when you have that, then you become generous, and when you have generosity, then you look at the people who are still not able to imagine the life that you are living and are waiting for their turn.

So, it was my turn to get and give back to the community, and nothing was better than this job. I think It'll be 4 years in April next year. It was a new contract. It was started 12 days before shutdown, in April of 2020; literally 12 days. Yes, April eighth was my employment date and April twentieth, we went into shutdown in San Francisco.

Can you share a bit more about how Openhouse helped reduce isolation during the pandemic?

It was really interesting how the program changed into a COVID "end isolation" kind of a program, which was not what the program was meant to be, and with the limitations of 6 feet distance. And, of course, not meeting people in public spaces at all.

We pivoted to phone calls. We pivoted to zoom sessions. We pivoted to conversations that actually talk about isolation really out in the open. And what can we do about that? We pivoted to your room. It was a "your own studio" kind of a situation where we would do a general open mic and your zoom window was your stage. So we did that, and people loved that, too.

You know, calling 82 transgender, gender non-conforming older adults once or twice every week really helped me move through COVID and the corona pandemic, helped me break my isolation and affirm my sense of life and identity and belongingness to a community, which was ready to accept me with open hands and say, "You're one of us. Come along." So really, it was a win-win situation, and I was getting paid for it.

#### Why do you think it is important to build these intergenerational connections?

I think it's really important because you do not get that in your normal course of life. You are a queer person who came out probably 10 years ago, and then now are in your mid 30's and 35, and feeling like you have nobody. You're just the senior most. **Nobody's there to put a hand on your head, be** really queer, and who understands what it means to exist in this world.

And here they come chatting away and full of life, and you know that there is despair, and there is loss. And there is heartbreak, and that's part of life, too. To know that, and know their sassy attitudes and amazing, amazing, comebacks. It's beautiful. It's a joy.

I honestly feel I am not very far away from the receiving end of these services, as far as my age is concerned, so I need to work doubly hard and doubly joyfully to really make it a listening post for all those who are coming behind us, because we can't be perfect. But, we can be good listeners.

#### What is the most challenging part of your work?

Part of it right now, and I know we'll get better at it, is the journey of mortality. How do we navigate that? How do we normalize that journey? How do we make it accessible so that we can talk about it, so that we are more prepared about it?

And especially as being transgender and nonconforming, along with the familiar umbrellas of society that are denied to transgender and nonconforming individuals, they are also denied some statutory, generic legal protections that go along with identity. It happens, more often than not, that none of their respects are honored, none of their wishes are sanctified. How do we prepare legal documents so that that doesn't happen?

That conversation is hard to have, because mortality is a big, stumbling block. But, we'll find beautiful, joyful ways to talk about it.

#### How is Openhouse addressing mental health within the LGBTQ+ community in San Francisco?

Openhouse has been playing around with various mental health benefits that they want to give to their staff members to enjoy and experiment with, and it has not always been the right fit. Sometimes we've actually figured out what is not a good fit, which is wonderful.

And then in terms of facilitation, we've just hired a facilitation training manager who's bringing 35 years of facilitation experience of HIV survivors. And one of the strongest tenets that he is looking at focusing on is, how the group can move from being a social event to an emotionally connected experience.

One of the most amazing things that happened last year was that we started a mental health program, which was giving a few hours of a specific level of mental therapy for our community members, for free, and one of our staff members who is a certified therapist was running those sessions.

We also recently got a TGNC case manager who comes with an extensive amount of experience with the community, which is really wonderful, because then they know there is more than one human with shared life experience to advocate for them at Openhouse, which is an important part of mental health.

#### What are some of the ways Openhouse is working to build community among older LGBTQ+ adults?

We are having a holiday party on December 17 that is going to be well attended. And, just last Thursday, November 16, we hosted a fall feast where 200 people were served fall food. It is a traditional annual affair. The entire staff is there with a lot of volunteer support. It was a fabulous affair. People love the food, love the company, and love the fact that they came in and they got that moment to socialize.

We have also moved to some programs catering to the AFAB community. We've had lesbian, bisexual, queer women's lunch and a gratitude circle, and we also have a new women's resource corner and coffee hour. Taking care of that as part of the LGBT section which is not really taken care of.

We have our men's drop-in support group. That is one of our largest groups and longest running groups for open house. That's why they need more than one facilitator in two different groups; they have to split because the group is so large. We are teaching, I think, seven different languages with our inhouse teacher, Señor Armando, who himself is, I think, seventy-plusyears-old, and is now teaching seven different language classes.

Every Wednesday night, we have our transgender gender nonconforming support group called TransResilience, which is also in person. We give car rides to everyone who wants to come from their home and back. That's part of the contract that we asked for. We said, support ain't good enough if it's not accessible.

#### Can you talk a little bit about how you see collective joy as a form of resistance?

There is so much fear inhabiting our lives, regardless of whether you're straight, or gay, or cis, or able-bodied, or disabled body. All of us are so afraid. I think, as human beings, when we see smaller acts of rebellion around us, it collectively inspires people to change or ask questions of *the status quo, and trans and intersex and gender nonconforming bodies* bring that little reprieve from "order following," from "rule non-breaking." You know, that rhythm that the social structures are so built on.

I define collective joy, not as the act of being joyful, but the act of being 'in joy,' which is different from being joyful. Being 'in joy' to me means conflicts, means open communication, means hurt and holding hurt, means I am available and vulnerable. I will go away, and I will come back; I cannot handle it, so I will cut my ties, but you know that they are not cut - that, to me, means collective joy.

Part of the flavor of being trans is the minoritization, the marginalization binds us to find community. It shouldn't be that way, and yet it is. **Every moment is** an act of resistance for a transgender, nonconforming human, because we are literally telling the universe, no! Or actually, we are saying, "Yeah! And..." That's what we're saying.

#### What are your hopes for the future of Openhouse?

I think the future of Openhouse should be like a nationwide concept of adult, older adult, and younger adult intergenerational conversations. What format do they take? What manifestations are they having at this physical meeting? Is it a Zoom Meeting? Is it a phone call meeting?

But let the gay generations unite. Let the trans community come together. Let us all redefine the word family. And, let's celebrate that because that family will promote humanity in its basic sense. And that's what we want here - human beings to recognize each other's pain and say, you're just like me.



# **Community News**

The Center for Sexuality and Gender Diversity has a New Executive **Director!** 

Jésus Martell González is a firstgeneration college graduate and first in his family to attain an MBA degree. He is an accomplished executive leader with a passion for forging diverse and resilient teams. With a proven track record of creating inclusive work environments, Jésus excels in building teams that thrive on



collaboration and innovation. In addition to his corporate experience, **Jésus is** deeply committed to improving the community through meaningful partnerships and his work with the <u>hellobakersfield! podcast</u>. As the newly appointed Executive Director of The Center for Sexuality and Gender Diversity, Jésus will be leading The Center through this next period of growth and expansion while continuing to build vital resources for the local LGBTQ+ community. His dedication to creating positive change and fostering diversity makes him a dynamic force in both professional and community-driven endeavors.

Gender Health Center is Hiring!





profit organization located in Sacramento, California, dedicated to providing services, resources, and support to the transgender and gender diverse community. The GHC is currently looking to hire an Executive **Director and a Director of Healthcare** Services.

The Executive Director's primary responsibility will be to oversee all aspects of the organization's operations, programs, and initiatives to ensure the delivery of high-quality services to the transgender and gender diverse community. They will play a pivotal role in leading and shaping the organization's mission, vision, and strategic direction.

The Director of Healthcare Services will be responsible for overseeing GHC's Healthcare Services department, which includes a harm reduction program, HIV/STD testing, a free hormone prescription clinic, and an upcoming hair removal clinic.

We encourage you to learn more and apply, or share the postings with your network!



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## Gender Spectrum Staff **Need Your Support!**

Gender Spectrum, an organization whose incredible work we were honored to feature in our spring quarterly newsletter, has closed; however, though their direct services have ended, their work continues. Their former staff members remain committed to transgender and non-binary youth and their

families everywhere. They are continuing the

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work they started through Gender Spectrum by working with facilitators and other organizations to find new supportive places for the families and organizational partners they previously served.

For more information about how you can help support former Gender Spectrum staff through this transition, visit their GoFundMe page.

Visit GoFundMe Page >

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### National Center for Lesbian Rights has a New Gender-Affirming Care Initiative!

Healthcare is Caring, a new initiative by National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR), highlights the need for access to both supportive guardians and gender affirming care for young people who are transgender. The initiative works against harmful legislation that blocks access to transgender health care, despite repeated statements from the medical community affirming that it is safe, essential and lifesaving. Visit NCLR's website to learn about how you can get involved with the Healthcare is Caring initiative.



Learn More About the Healthcare is Caring Initiative >



**Contact Our Team:** http://lgbtq-ta-center.org/ contact-us

1-877-568-4227

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Center for Applied Research Solutions (CARS) | 1275 4th St., #190, Santa Rosa, CA 95404

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