

women. "The team begins with the community first," Dansereau said. "We must never forget to serve them."

LGBTQ POLITICS



The presence of LGBTQ candidates is necessary, say activists. In 2017, more than 120 bills described as "anti-LGBTQ" were introduced across 30 states. Laws that controlled adoption procedures and the not-so-popular bathroom bills were among them. By January of 2018, 12 of them had become law.

"A lot of people have stepped up and said: I think I can do this now," said Sean Meloy, senior political director at the Victory Fund. "It's not a deal-breaker to be LGBTQ. The community is no longer looking for support from politicians; we're running for political office."

In 2019, Carol Rizzo of Neptune Township won the "At Large" seat and was the first lesbian mayor of that town. Michael DeFusco in Hoboken City won his seat representing Ward 1 on the town's City Council. Bloomfield's Rich Rockwell and Wartyna Davis both won the "At Large" seats for Town Council.

Since the election of the first out-LGBTQ person to political office, Harvey Milk in San Francisco 45 years ago, about 700 of the country's 500,000 or so elected officials are members of the LGBTQ community. Here in New Jersey, there are about 11,000 elected officials, and more than 40 self-identify as LGBT.

LGBTQ representation matters. When it comes to politics, New Jersey is not just talking the talk, but, finally, walking the walk.

TRAILBLAZING LGBTQ ALLIES IN SOUTH JERSEY

JFCS of Southern New Jersey

by LANA LEONARD

For Reva Farenback-Brateman, LGBTQ programming at the Jewish Family & Child Services of Southern New Jersey (JFCS) began after meeting a couple at Memory Café, a space facilitated by Farenback-Brateman dedicated to those with memory loss, Alzheimer's, and dementia. The two men have been together for decades, traveling through times of violence and peace within LGBTQ history. Upon noticing this lifelong pair, Farenback-Brateman thought, "What has it been like for them?"

Farenback-Brateman said it was this couple (one gentleman in his 80s and the other in his 90s) that inspired the focus of LGBTQ elders in a new group titled Aging with Pride. The first meeting was held in April of 2018. An original seven attendees grew to an emailing list of 42, where 32 of those 42 have come to at least one meeting. Farenback-Brateman shares that she is cisgendered, straight, and in her 60s. Having been an ally for decades, it came to Farenback-Brateman's attention that there was much more for her to learn upon opening up LGBTQ programming ideas.

"We want to make sure a client walking in feels welcome," said the Associate Director of JFCS

and LGBTQ ally, Beth Wynne. Wynne said that the JFCS's journey started three and a half years ago. The center began contacting the umbrella organization of The Network of Jewish Human Industries. The service center became a part of a cohort of agencies under The Network and started with all day training with JFCS to manifest their mission for equality. Training came under partnership with the LGBTQ Jewish support, training organization, Keshet and the JFCS of Philadelphia. Wynne had a mentor named Pheonix who assisted in changing the bathroom signs, adding the pride flag, competence training, and helped with programs such as The Rainbow Table designated for LGBTQ people 18 and up. Pheonix's visibility as a transgender social worker gave the youth of The Rainbow Table a story and life they could relate to.

Many LGBTQ elders come from Philadelphia to meet with Aging with Pride. The programs are free thanks to funding by Camden County Board Freeholders and private donations.

Some group members also go to the LGBTQ William Way Center in Philadelphia. The center wants to ensure that all LGBTQ community members have outlets. By paying attention to the diversity of people attending LGBTQ



programming, the JFCS is able to see where the needs are. For example, Farenback-Brateman said that she wishes Aging with Pride had more lesbians. This holds true in other groups like The Rainbow Table. Similarly, the JFCS is finding there are fewer 20-somethings and transgender individuals attending. With this knowledge, the organization hopes to broaden not just their numbers but all the letters of the community.

What Farenback-Brateman and Wynne made clear is that embracing the LGBTQ community is ongoing, that language, knowledge, groups, and support go beyond the signage of a bathroom, beyond that of raising a flag. "Due to discrimination not many of our LGBTQ people made it through their career and are still working part-time." She shares that this group of older LGBTQ individuals, ranging in age from 52-92, now have a place to speak of their fear of loneliness, illness, and their past.

"All LGBTQ dates we wouldn't have celebrated historically are dates we follow," said Wynne. "We want to increase awareness."

The elders wanted to have a conversation about LGBTQ history with the youth. The group insisted they meet with The Rainbow Table. The elders figured it was important to ensure that, while alive, youth have an under-

standing of their lineage. Becoming what would be known as the Intergenerational Programming, the elder's spoke with teens and young adults. To the elders' surprise, the youths had already acquired a great knowledge of queer American history.

"We are all vulnerable groups in the current social and political environment and through oneness can be stronger against these influences in doing so strengthens the world around us," Don Cook, a member of Aging with Pride, said, "and hopefully protects all rights to what every human being should have."

With a desire to open the conversation with parents, Wynne thinks having workshops for parents will broaden expectations of tweens and teenagers. This can be done by giving parents the same training they underwent. It starts with talking and asking questions in order to close the gaps of ignorance. It opens a door of possibilities. JFCS wants to open that door to the world and say, "we can help."

JFCS has worked with The Network and Garden State Equality's Health and Wellness Coordinator, Bianca Mayes. They work with social work professors from Stockton and Monmouth Universities. And as allies, they understand the importance of visibility and often have LGBTQ

guest speakers. Some of which include David Griffith, Director of LGBTQ Elder Initiative, an organization dedicated to the livelihood of older LGBTQ individuals.

"You don't have to be Jewish to use our services," Wynne said. The center itself is open to all individuals. JFCS's LGBTQ programming has been met with much discovery in intersectional identity. Some young adults felt the intersections of Judaism and LGBTQ could never meet, while another group member said he felt Judaism had shunned him until he came to The Rainbow Table. As some individuals are still coming to terms with their intersections, Wynne said she hopes to find more clergy guest speakers to assist in stitching congruence toward these intersections.

Along with Aging with Pride and The Rainbow Table comes Project Rainbow for teens. There are plans for tweens between the sixth and eighth grades, LGBTQ counseling and workshops for parents, domestic violence counseling and training. For more on the services at JFCS of Southern New Jersey call, (856) 424-1333.

jfcssnj.org

QSPOT ANNOUNCES EXPANSION PLANS

by PETER FRYCKI

QSpot LGBTQ Community Center announced that the Board has approved plans to move and expand to a new location in Asbury Park. The new location will continue to be a dedicated safe space.

The location and design is modeled after QSpot's Library Lounge, and an integral part of Qspot since 2015. The new facility is being designed to feature the QSpot Cafe offering a variety of coffees, soft drinks, snacks, and healthy foods in a relaxed, casual, and open setting.

It will be situated on Asbury Avenue in Asbury

Park. It is less than a mile from the current location in Ocean Grove at the Jersey Shore Arts Center. The building offers plenty of free parking and easy access by bus or bike. It is located in a vibrant and friendly neighborhood, said a Press Release.

"Today, QSpot's leadership is grateful to say that with the help of dedicated volunteers, generous donors, and an amazing LGBT and allied community, we're taking another step towards ensuring QSpot always has a home,"



said John Mikytuck, QSpot Executive Director. "The next step will be to transform our new facility into a warm and welcoming gathering spot."

Qspot.org