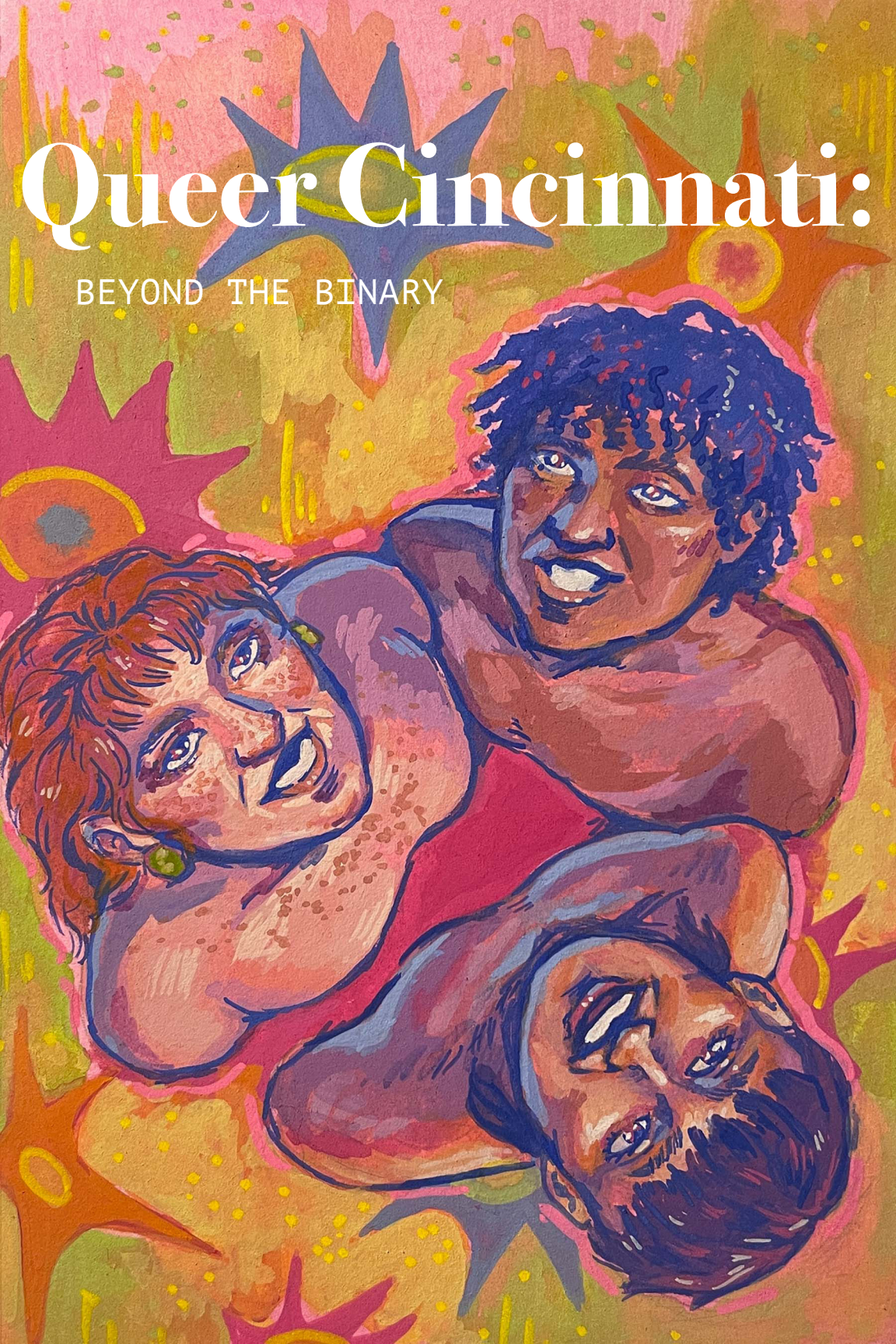
Queer Cincinnati:

BEYOND THE BINARY



About This Issue

MADE BY AND FOR TRANS AND NONBINARY YOUTH

How it happened

In November 2024, Cincinnati City Council set aside $500,000 over two years for the mental health and safety of the city's trans and nonbinary young people. Community Shares of Greater Cincinnati runs the fund for the city.

In October 2025, $20,000 went to this magazine, managed by regional LGBTQ+ nonprofit publisher Queer Kentucky and modeled on Death Before Detransition, a magazine made by Kentucky trans youth. Trans and nonbinary writers, artists and photographers ages 18 to 24 made every page, with pay and editorial support.

Read it online

Every story in this issue, plus the art and the people who made it:

queerkentucky.com/queer-cincinnati

If you need support

Some stories in this issue discuss suicide, conversion therapy and violence. You are not alone.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988, then press 3 for counselors trained in LGBTQ+ care

Trans Lifeline: 877-565-8860

The Trevor Project: 1-866-488-7386, or text START to 678-678

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GG Gabennesch and Secondhand Circus

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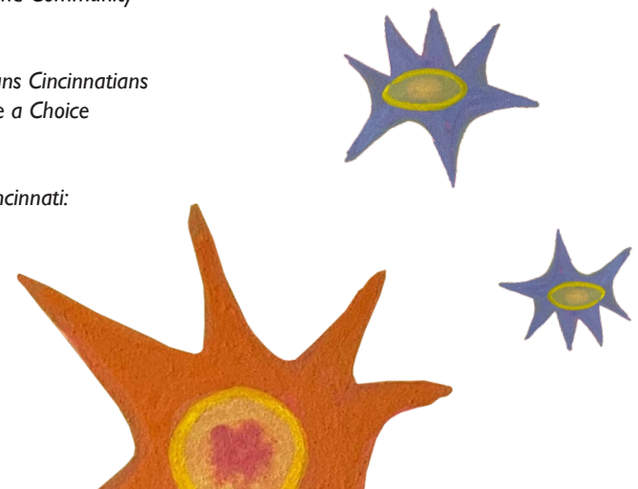


Letter From the Co-Editor

BY: NYLA DAVIES

Dear Reader,

As you flip through the pages of the very first issue of the Trans Cincinnati Magazine, I wish to inspire each and every one of you to find hope and community in the stories we have curated.

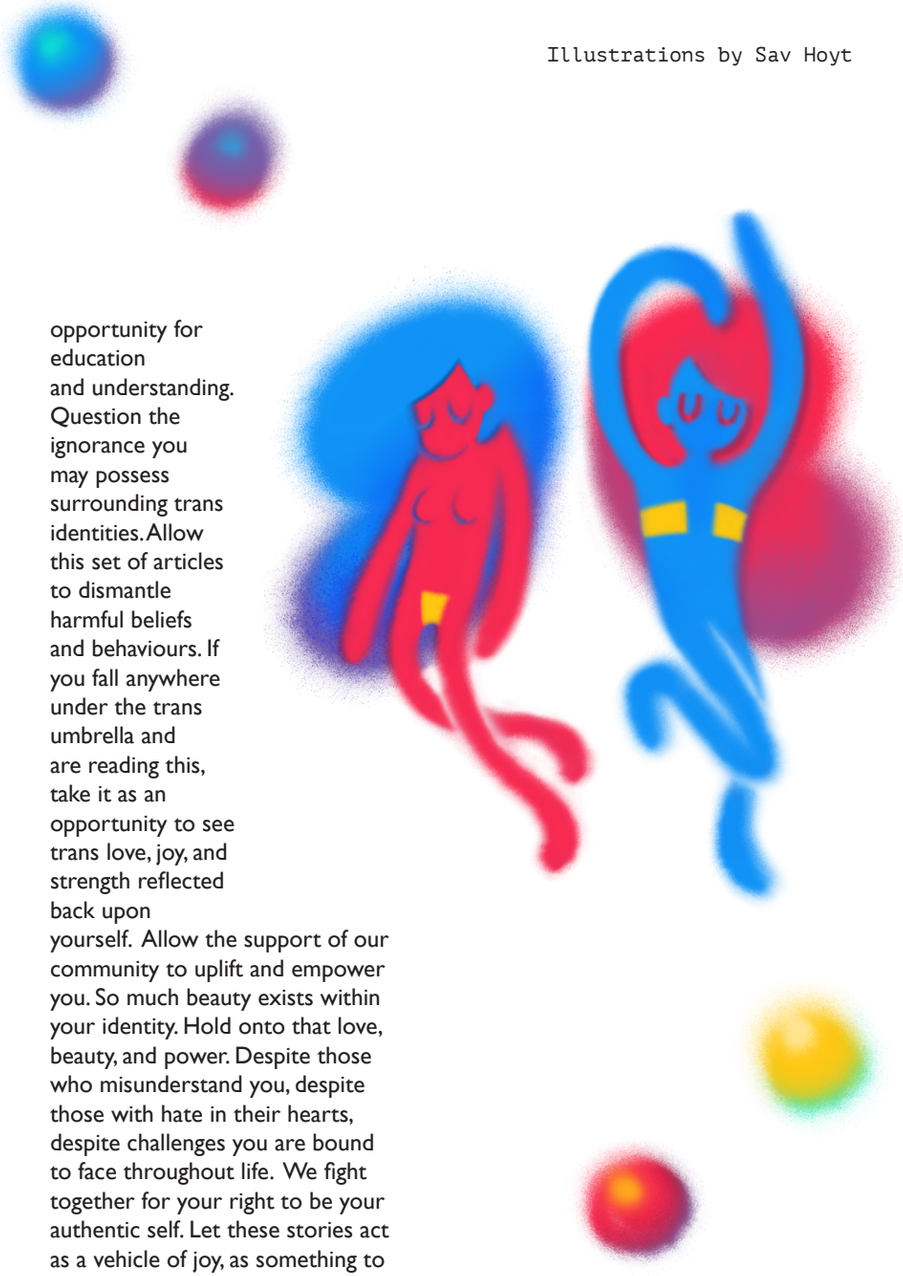
This magazine is an accumulation of authentic voices, anecdotes of trans joy, and critiques on current predatory legislation. Experiences ranging from liberation, to discrimination, to connection made within the community are depicted. I am more than eager to spotlight residents of the beautiful city of Cincinnati and their real, unembellished trans experiences. I also want to thank Queer Kentucky for the opportunity to expand their outreach to the state of Ohio, giving us the chance to spotlight important resources within our state. Additionally, I would like to mention TransOhio, Transform, Trans Masc Cincy, and Equitas Health. These organizations work to carve out a rightful place for trans youth. Whether that be through creating gathering spaces for the queer community, helping folks understand how to secure affirming care, or simply providing a safe space for those with intersecting identities, these organizations all show up for trans Cincinnatians.

In a world where trans youth are so often made to be silenced, a publication like this is extremely important. The statements within each article are testimonies about trans lives from actual trans individuals. From start to finish, this collection was brought to life by trans youth, for trans youth. Our writers and artists have poured talent, beauty, and truth into this project, and love can be felt throughout every page. When presented with the chance to work as co-editor of this project, I leaped at the opportunity. I am proud to be a part of this community, and to be completely surrounded by visionaries in my day to day life. I am consistently reminded of the radiance that exists in Cincinnati's trans youth, along with the ambition to actively create a future in which all identities are honored and respected. What you are about to read is not only proof of that ambition, but documentation of firsthand interactions with the current cultural/social state of the world.

If you are not trans and reading this, take it as an opportunity for education and understanding. Question the ignorance you may possess surrounding trans identities. Allow this set of articles to dismantle harmful beliefs and behaviours. If you fall anywhere under the trans umbrella and are reading this, take it as an opportunity to see trans love, joy, and strength reflected back upon yourself. Allow the support of our community to uplift and empower you. So much beauty exists within your identity. Hold onto that love, beauty, and power. Despite those who misunderstand you, despite those with hate in their hearts, despite challenges you are bound to face throughout life. We fight together for your right to be your authentic self. Let these stories act as a vehicle of joy, as something to remind you that you are not alone, and you are worthy of care.

-Nyla Davies
Co-Editor

Illustrations by Sav Hoyt



University of Cincinnati's Attack on Trans Students Sparks the Rise of a New Queer Fraternity

BY: EDDY RISIMINI

In the spring of my freshman year at the University of Cincinnati (UC), Ohio Senate Bill 1 was moving through the state legislature. The bill, which would take effect on June 27th, 2025, requires Ohio's public colleges and universities to maintain institutional neutrality and "intellectual diversity" on certain "controversial beliefs and policies" including climate policy, electoral politics, foreign policy, immigration, marriage, and abortion. It also bars faculty from "indoctrinating" students toward a position on these topics, bars the institution itself from taking an official stance, and eliminates diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) offices, departments, and required trainings at the same institutions.

UC, however, wasted no time adopting these principles, even before the bill became law. UC President Neville Pinto complied in advance, stating in a public email on February 21st, 2025 that "it is untenable to operate as if noncompliance with these directives is an effective option" and that "we are committed to meet our compliance obligations." Soon after President Pinto's address, DEI offices including the LGBTQ+ Center, the Women's Center, Ethnic Program Services (EPS), and the African American Cultural Resource Center (AACRC) were immediately shut down. Many students, myself included, felt this response failed to address their concerns.

That same spring, the university began replacing bathroom signage with new "biological men" and "biological women" signs. This action was a result of Ohio Senate Bill 104, the "Protect All Students Act," signed by Governor Mike DeWine in November 2024, which prohibits members of one biological sex from using restrooms designated for the opposite biological sex and erases multi-occupancy restrooms open to any gender. The law does require institutions to provide alternative



From left, Seth Rane, Grayson Castellucci, and Eddy Risimini by Harper Thomson

accommodations, such as single-occupancy facilities, but the bathroom signage UC implemented was worded of their own accord. The new signs were adopted quickly, sending a clear message that transgender, nonbinary, and intersex students were not welcome. Because of this, many students became worried that their university housing options would no longer be viable if the available restrooms did not match their "biological sex." As a trans man living in freshman dorms at the time, I worried for my housing security.

My fears came true when my fellow trans roommates Seth Rane, Grayson Castellucci, and I were relocated to the margins of campus mid-spring semester. We were originally approached in an email by UC's Director of Resident Education & Development at the time, Trent Pinto, on February 10th, 2025. Pinto invited us to a "conversation regarding upcoming changes to the residential experience." This meeting was held at UC's LGBTQ+ Center before it was dissolved, and its conclusion resulted in two options: 1) Stay in our dorms and travel to the women's dorms to use the restroom, or 2) Relocate to an off-campus apartment where we would have access to a personal restroom.

Option 1 was an unreasonable request for us. Not only was this option directly invalidating our identities as men, but it was also oversaturating the communal space and required us to travel to a different floor or building to use the restroom. Because of this, my roommates and I conceded to option 2 and were relocated to an apartment near campus. While UC quickly responded to a flood of backlash by removing the bathroom signs, the damage had already been done. What was supposed to be an exciting year to make new friends and invest in our studies instead became a year where we were isolated from our peers and pulled from our classes to accommodate the move to our new apartment.

Amidst the predatory legislation and considerable lack of LGBTQ+ spaces, we quickly realized we were not alone in our isolation and observed an almost solemn environment throughout campus. To combat this, my roommates and I decided to make a change.

One day after class, I came home to Seth and Grayson sharing the idea of starting a queer fraternity: Phi Alpha Gama (PAG). At first, we treated it as a joke. After all, it is customary across university Greek life to exclusively allow one gender (women in sororities, men in fraternities). It seemed absurd to imagine visibly queer or transgender individuals enjoying this same staple of college life, but the more we thought about it, the more we realized that PAG's existence might be a space that UC's LGBTQ+ community desperately needed: a space made by queer people for queer people to enjoy without consequence.

A fraternity was the best option for us to organize an LGBTQ+-friendly community because we felt that queer individuals deserved to be included in traditional college experiences that they may otherwise shy away from. We gathered a few close friends to join PAG, but we realized that to expand our community past our small clique, we needed to give our fraternity structure. To do this, we created the governing body of PAG, consisting of the following roles: president, vice president, secretary, recruitment officers, philanthropy chair, social media chair, diversity chair, and grievance officer.

We didn't expect PAG to be more than a small community at first, but soon, friends of friends came to our parties and told their friends about PAG, and it became a vast network of students where all are welcome. During our recent spring rush campaign, we had a great turnout, with around 30 members present and 10 rushees. We implemented different group bonding activities including ice breaker games and a friendly s'mores roasting competition. However, the main standout of this event came about when several people approached our front yard asking about the event we were hosting. What stood out to me the most was how accommodating the members of PAG were to total strangers. Seeing a community that I helped create foster such a kind and welcoming environment made me realize how important PAG was to creating a safe space for queer and allied individuals to be themselves and make new connections.



Eddy Risimini by Harper Thomson
Illustration by Sav Hoyt





Kenni by Harper Thomson taken at Secondhand Circus owned by GG Gabennesch

Queer Utility in Fashion

BY: ARLO GRIMALDI

Transgender people from all unique walks of life have a very different relationship with fashion than their cisgender peers. For transgender youth, how they choose to dress themselves can have a wide variety of purposes in their day to day lives. For many trans people, how they dress can often impact how they affirm their own gender, relate their gender expression to others, and protect themselves and their community. With what feels like limited spaces to celebrate transgender bodies, and the constant commentary on trans expression from cisgender peers, transgender youth are looking inwards. Through this they are finding home within themselves and their community through dress.

Stone (They/Them), 23, Hometown: Roebuck, SC

"What item of clothing was a milestone in your transition?"

Stone: *This orange dress that I was able to turn into pants. A big thing to me is androgyny. Having a dress and knowing that I can wear whatever with it really brought out that experience. And can I even say it's mine if I didn't make it my own? I don't have enough dresses and skirts but I'll get there.*

With clothing being so attached to gender expression in our society, the ability to modify that clothing can be very important to many trans people. Clothing can determine much of how you're perceived by others. With most mainstream clothing often being designed around the gender binary, altering garments to be more androgynous/ fitting can be deeply fulfilling.



Stone by Harper Thomson

Kenni (She/Her), 22, Hometown: Delhi Township, Ohio

"Do you find home and gender euphoria in clothing that people might imagine to be a bit more physically restrictive, and if so what garments?"

Kenni: *Honestly my heels. With my thigh high boots, you have to wear them for a while and work them in, but once you've had them for a while I feel like you can do anything in these heels, it feels like I am just wearing some gym shoes.*

"Does your dress inform how you feel within your body or do you think it more informs what you can accomplish with your body?"

Kenni: *Definitely the latter. Sometimes you have to know you can't be dancing the absolute most in a little dress, but I will [still] be dancing around busting my ass.*

Way (She/Her/Hers), 21, Hometown: Loogootee, Indiana

"How does your career in musical theatre and acting impact your dress and transition?"

Way: *Dress in a lot of ways is everything. It's what the people behind the table like casting directors and artistic directors see first before you even open your mouth. I want to ensure I am representing myself in the most authentic way without dampening who I am.*



From left, Way and Emmet by Harper Thomson

"Why do you think hyper utilitarian garments (for example carabiners, cargo pants, combat boots) are so popular amongst trans people?"

Way: *[In my opinion], queer people are overwhelmingly more common amongst the working class because there is less energy available to try to hide something. We make up a good part of the labor force. There is also this idea of needing to be ready to be equipped to stand up for yourself and being ready to help and protect other queer people.*

Clothing not only serves as a means of expression but also for everyday utility. Sporting a more utilitarian look is a form of anti-fashion. Rejecting consumeristic, highly gendered, and rigid fashion standards. Not only for comfort and mobility, but also for the very genuine purpose of expressing one's authentic identity.

Emmet (They/He), 24, Hometown: Anderson Township, OH

"What was it like growing up queer and trans in Anderson? Did you feel like you had to make any compromises in your dress to be safe "

Emmet: *It was one of those things that was never talked about in my household. I grew up religious and homeschooled so I didn't get to see a lot until I got my first barista job when I was 18. I was introduced to people that used different pronouns, that were trans and queer. Anderson has gotten better but it's not the most accepting place. At first when I was newly queer I would definitely 'tone it down'. As I have grown into dressing how I feel it's still very scary and intimidating. You never know how people are going to respond to crazy makeup or a shaved head. I am going to look queer no matter what. Travelling around Cincinnati for sure changes how I dress, closer to downtown I really get to go to the max with it.*

Elliot (They/He/She), 22, Hometown: Cincinnati, OH

"If dressing ever felt like a costume, when did it stop feeling like a costume?"

Elliot: *Looking back in my early transition, I painted on my eyebrows and I would make facial hair with my makeup, it felt like I was performing the most hyper masculine. When 2020 hit , I loved experimenting and playing with makeup and that is when I got a little bit more feminine. It hit me that I didn't have to perform as much, I could use it as a chance to be more fluid, more for myself than the people around me. It really just matters day to day about how I present myself. That fluidity has allowed me to really find myself and connect to my body.*



Elliot by Harper Thomson

As fluid as gender identity and expression can be for many transgender people, one of the many utilities of dress can be its ability to change with us. This not only allows for us to accurately portray ourselves to the world at large, but also aids in us being able to break down internal biases and shame. Experimentation and fluidity in one's dress can become an essential part of the journey towards true self expression.

Thank you to Secondhand Circus and GG for allowing us into your space, and thank you for what you do for the Cincinnati transgender community.

Bathroom Signage Policy at The University of Cincinnati Causes Action And Raises Questions About The Rights of Trans Students

BY: AVERY SMITH

On February 25th, 2025, Ohio Revised Code 3345.90 went into effect, which requires higher education institutions to designate multi-occupant student restrooms, student locker rooms, student show rooms, and student changing rooms, "for the exclusive use by students of the male biological sex only or by students of the female biological sex only."[1]

In an attempt to abide by this law, the University of Cincinnati (UC) replaced the gendered bathroom signage around campus to state, "Biological Men," and "Biological Women."

UC sent out an email the following day in which they recognized that the current signage using the term "biological" was an error.

[1] https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3345.90

The email went on to further state, "We recognize that recent signage updates have raised concerns. Please know that our intention was never to withhold important information or create uncertainty. The university's requirement to comply with the law does not take away from its commitment to creating a learning environment that fosters opportunity and develops educated and engaged citizens."

As a response to the university, Simone Balachandran aka Simon Brine, associate professor and environmental engineering educator in the department of chemical engineering, called for trans women and allies to show up to the locker rooms in protest. In early March, Brine, along with several other trans women, went into the men's locker room, stripped down naked, and talked to the cisgender men in the bathroom. "I felt powerful. I wanted to force them to see what a trans woman's body looks like.

When people see trans bodies, it will change their minds," Brine said. When asked about her thought process behind the protest, Brine responded, "It is called activist judo. The idea is not to try and win; it is to try and lose, with the reasoning coming from the reality that the law is not going to be in your favor, but you can exploit the loss. I am going to follow the law, and the law allows me to get naked in the locker room and force you into a position where you have to recognize my existence."

"When we asked the men there what they thought about the law and the sign, all of them thought it was ridiculous and thought we should be in the other locker room. One person even thought they were going into the wrong locker room," Brine said.

But do trans and gender non-conforming students actually feel that the university is committed to fostering a safe and effective learning environment?

Noah Wardega, a recent UC graduate, does not think so. "My first thought was that it is impractical. How could they even enforce that? But, ever since the policy was put in place, I stopped using the bathrooms on campus." When asked about the impact the policy had on their life, Seven Kiener, a senior social work student, said, "It caused me to completely reevaluate my relationship with the service work I was doing for the university. I have completely stepped away from any UC-based groups and changed my plans for grad school so that they no longer include UC."

It is clear the law has rattled trans people on campus, and when asked how UC can better protect trans students, Eliza Guerra, a university member, said, "We need more classes and instructors teaching queer authors and content without fear of anti-DEI policies.

But can professors and staff actually do that?

SB 1, the "Advance Higher Education Act," requires institutional neutrality on controversial political or global matters while also requiring institutions to conduct annual faculty reviews.

So, when the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security released its third red flag alert warning that the United States is within the early to middle stages of a genocidal process against trans people, "the goal of which is to completely erase transgender people not only from public life but also from existence in the U.S. and globally,"[2] there is a real question about how professors would even be able to bring this report up. Brine believes that to present this to a classroom of students, you would have to also present the conservative argument regarding transgender rights.

As of today, UC has since removed "biological" from their bathroom signs, but what were now gender neutral bathrooms have since turned into single-use bathrooms.

[2] https://www.lemkininstitute.com/red-flag-alerts/red-flag-alert---anti-trans-genocide-in-the-usa---%233



Illustrations by Ian Johnson

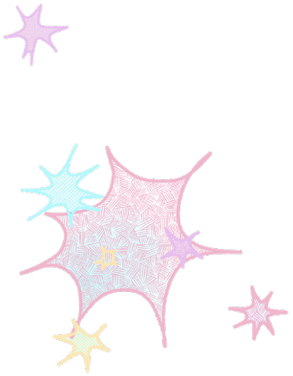
On What To Expect

BY: KAIDEN JACQUES

When I moved to Ohio nearly 5 years ago, I had absolutely no idea what I was doing. Behind my own medical transition was an individual navigating healthcare decisions, personal identity, and a lot of uncertainty. While the thought of medically transitioning was extremely daunting at first, I found community in my trans friends, trans support groups, and queer healthcare systems that specialize in affirming care. When I was dropped off in Cincinnati at 17 to begin my new city life, I realized I had a lot to figure out. It was late fall, 2017. I had just realized transitioning was even an option for myself. I came stumbling out of the closet, taking my first few steps with a new name and look. The first few months were horrifying. Thankfully, I quickly found that people were much more accepting than what I had braced myself for. I found myself being introduced to a whole community of others who I identified with. We were all in the same queer boat, and it was a rocky one.

By the time I turned 19, I felt it was time for me to start medically transitioning, and I wasn't alone. When talking to some of my other trans friends (especially those pre-transition), the question of whether it was too soon or too late often came up as a concern. While I believe it's never too soon or too late, certain restrictions in Ohio make age one of the main factors in considering who can, and cannot, transition. For example, House Bill 68, enacted in 2024, sets 18 as the legal age for accessing gender affirming care. While the process itself may look different, and you may have different experiences than others, age has nothing to do with who can begin their transition. I still felt too young, admittedly, but also too old when I started. My whole life I watched the world shame kids and teenagers who were happy in their body as kids that would come to "regret it" later in their life. It felt like trying to find my way while walking in the dark when it came to what my insurance covered. I didn't know where to go, who to talk to, or what I was supposed to know. Ohio is one of the many states that score negatively in gender care according to the Movement Advancement Project (MAP) as of 2025. While city protections and ordinances protect Ohioans from discrimination surrounding things like applying for employment and housing, that same protection doesn't follow you once you leave city lines. Even still, I've been rejected from countless jobs as my identity was just "too confusing" for them to understand and accept. This is something I would have liked to know before I moved here

While I can't speak for the collective experience of hormone therapy, the initial steps are incredibly daunting. I'm grateful that I had friends in similar situations who guided me to Equitas Health, a service dedicated to the queer community. They stand as a federally designated Community Health Center specializing in inclusive care. To get started, you'll likely have to be diagnosed with gender dysphoria for some time, and have a physical with plenty of bloodwork, as HRT can absolutely affect your cardiovascular health. Patience was the hardest thing to learn throughout the process. It won't happen overnight, not even in the first few months. You'll probably beat yourself up over it, wondering when it'll happen and if it was even worth it. But my advice would be to give it time, and you'll forget why you were so worried in the first place.



After my first few doses of HRT, I had to fight my insurance to keep it. My options were already limited, and I became allergic to what was covered. I ended up losing my insurance before we could begin discussing alternatives. HRT without insurance appeared to be one issue after another. Out of pocket, prices can be anywhere from $50 to $500 per month, depending on what you're taking. From experience, it's not uncommon for people to put a "pause" on their transition simply because the costs are too much. While I'm glad I was able to get on Medicaid, the constant changing of predatory laws can't guarantee it remains an option.

There's a lot to expect, and a lot more that will catch you off guard. Transitioning will change the way you see yourself, the way others see you, and your relationship with the world around you. So where should you start? Start by talking to as many people you know, then keep talking to even more people. As infinite as the internet is in knowledge, the actual in-person experiences of those I talked to gave me much more insight. Support groups and queer events are everywhere when you know where to look. Talk to friends and family about who and what they know. If the option is there, talk to your doctor, therapist, and your psychiatrist. They will know more about how to get the ball rolling on their end. If you can't talk offline, start talking online too. Start by getting out there, and don't stop once you do. You'll be surprised by how much your community has to offer.

Return to The Body, Return to The Land: Being a Queer Arab in the Diaspora

BY: CHRIS SIFRI

Queer identities have existed fluidly for centuries within multiple cultural landscapes, outside of the one-dimensional scope of imperial Western thinking. European colonization within the Middle East held the true power of creating mechanisms of repression in terms of homosexuality. The Western ideal is to create boxes for humans in order to arbitrate the way in which we express ourselves. I live through the notion that to be Queer is to exist as a form of resistance, meaning to be Palestinian inherently is to be Queer.

My Jido grew up in Yaffa, Palestine and was forcibly expelled from his home in 1948 by the illegal occupation. I sit with him as he recites poems and memories of his childhood in Yaffa. He leads me through the streets of our city that are now beneath skyscrapers and settlers. He sings me songs that his dad would play on the oud in the salon of their house. I come from a family filled with artists, but after the Nakba, everything changed. My Jido shares how his father was beaten by the Israeli Occupation Forces in 1936, then again in 1948.

He tells me about how they fled; an Uncle, who owned a bus company, which once ran between Al-Ramleh, Yaffa, and Al-Quds, filled the buses to capacity and left.

My Teta grew up in Bechmezzine, Lebanon, a small Orthodox Christian village. I live in the diaspora. I watch as many celebrate a so-called ceasefire, for a number of times I cannot count anymore along with the number of bombs that have dropped, violations of international law, proof of genocide, children murdered, and so on. It is June in Cincinnati; I often sit with the fig tree behind our house, which my Teta gifted us before she passed. This tree represents the breaking of generational cycles of fear, and the grounding of cycles of ancestral healing.

While living in Chicago post October 7, 2023, I was embraced by the Queer Palestinian community. Every week we'd gather to practice our lost traditional arts of singing, painting, tatreez, and dance. This led to a formulation internally of the beauty of living within the intersections of being Queer and Arab. What I found most important



Chris Sifri by GG Gabennesch

would be the nights of dancing at a DJ Nanoos set. While dancing dabka and belly dancing - despite your gender - there was an unspoken freedom on the dance floor where we could all shamelessly showcase our Queer Palestinian existence through our bodies, all while living in a world that ostracizes these identities. For a century, the occupation has forced fear upon us. Alongside the introduction of foreign colonial powers within our homelands came restrictions on our sexual beings and livelihoods.

In 2013, after training mice to fear the smell of cherry blossoms by pairing it with small shocks, researchers found that generational trauma lives within our bodies. The children and grandchildren of these mice were born with an inherent fear of the scent, even though they had never smelled it before. We have been forced into cages and have constricted our bodies. The occupation forced my father's, father's, father to be small, afraid, and run. This visceral feeling of running has been intergenerationally passed down within bodies and bloodlines.

We must realize the intersection between colonial trauma, sexual imperialism, and diaspora consciousness. I have been trying to articulate what connects my Queerness and Arabness, it is our refusal to conform and a necessity to return to our humanity. The action of return connects us all.







All of the loss we have experienced sits within me. I do not forget the ways in which we create with our hands, bodies, and voices. I have grazed the borders, those of which I am not permitted to cross. I have seen home from over the valley and from the peak of the mountains. I

have tasted sweet return on the tip of my tongue. I have found return within my throat, as the muscles contract in ways only done two generations ago. I have found home within my fingertips as they glide along a canvas, as they stitch British missiles onto cloth, as they pick figs from the tree she once held. Exile is an act of being. Exile forces home to be anywhere and everywhere except for the place you long to go. Return is a practice. Returning home is a return to the body. The land is my body.

I am rooted in my land, although thousands of miles away, I am rooted in her pain and resilience for it lives in my body. I allow my body to freely move in the fluidity of being a Queer Arab in the diaspora. As the world attempts to ethnically cleanse our people, land, and our culture we continue to resist and refuse erasure.

Left, photos of the installation Reclamation Through Art: Tatreez Resistance by Chris Sifri

Right, *فلسطين* by Chris Sifri



Resources, Rights, and Community

BY: NYLA DAVIES

For many transgender Ohioans, recent legislation has reshaped the conversation around healthcare, education, and safety. At the center of these conversations, with a central mission to provide facts around these sometimes confusing subjects, is TransOhio. In the summer of 2026, I conducted an interview with Dara Adkison, the Executive Director of TransOhio, a nonbinary, genderqueer, trans-masculine person who previously served on the TransOhio Board of Directors for two years.

What was the driving force that led to the start of TransOhio?

TransOhio has been around for 21 years in a variety of different iterations. We started in 2005 when there wasn't a trans organization in the state. We started off as a Zine actually, providing resources, community spaces, and message board kind of stuff. It was a place for different kinds of voices to be heard. We started making zines again recently. We have a rolling admission for when we have enough submissions to put together something cool.

What are some of the tangible ways in which you've been able to carry out your mission of protecting and advancing the rights of trans, nonbinary, intersex, and gender nonconforming people in Ohio?

We are hard focused on what is tangible. We don't do performative at TransOhio. We have a longstanding (over 10 years now) legal clinic for anyone who needs care, all free for any trans person who needs it. We've helped over 4000 trans people in Ohio with name changes and gender marker changes. We also have an emergency fund which has exponentially scaled in the last two years. We provide emergency help for people who reach out and might be in a dangerous situation. We have recently passed out $250,000 out to our community statewide. If people are trans in Ohio and are in need of help, we're gonna help them.

TransOhio's vision mentions wanting to increase lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, and ally understanding/ cultural awareness of the Ohio transgender community. In your eyes, what does being a good ally to the trans community mean today?

I think that being an ally today is not being afraid to stick your neck out. We don't need allies that are going to wave a flag, but then be silent when they see a trans person getting yelled at on the street. We don't need allies that will wear a love wins pin, but then when they see the gender expansive person at their job getting discriminated against they don't say anything. We need people to be vocal in those small moments that are very large for the people being directly impacted by them. We need people to be vocal with their legislators. That's where I see allyship.

Your brochure mentions advocating for laws and policies which best protect our most vulnerable community members. In what ways do you advocate for those with intersecting identities, especially when factors other than transphobia (like racism and sexism) are sometimes still very present within trans communities?

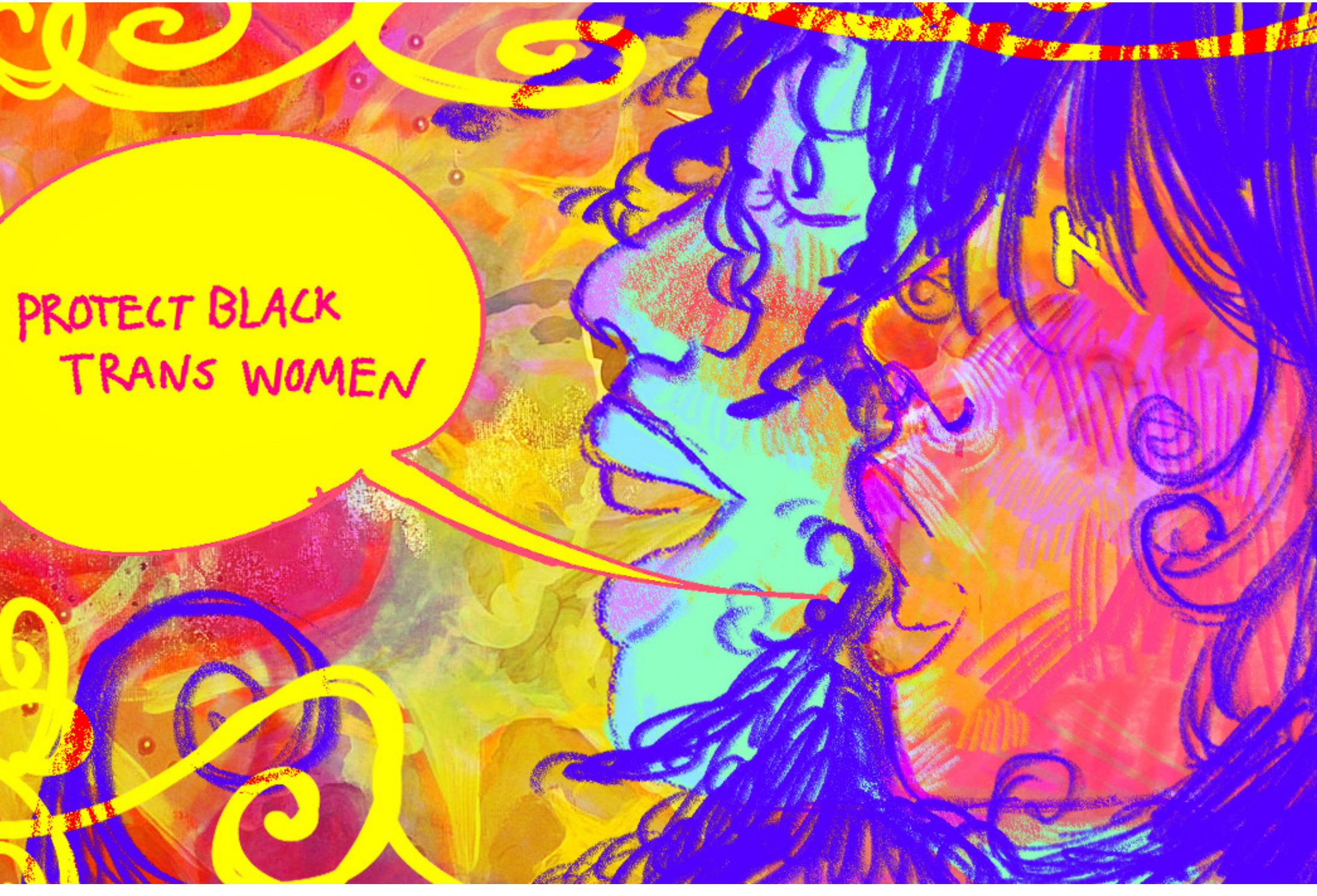
At TransOhio, whenever we ourselves are running a program or partnering on an event, we do everything we can to not just make the spaces inclusive, but welcoming. We are very intentional about making sure people from a variety of intersecting identities are in our leadership, and also in the room when we are figuring out plans and programs. As a white trans leader, I am personally very vocal about making sure doors are open. You won't find me doing an all white panel.

The Cleveland clinic recently agreed to a 20 year ban of gender affirming treatment for patients under the age of 18. This includes puberty blockers, hormone therapy, and other treatments. You've made efforts to put out many facts about this settlement. As there are unfortunately more laws being put out very similar to this settlement, how do you counteract the ambiguity? How do you lessen the confusion surrounding them?

Our main tactic for lessening confusion is to try and put out as much correct information as possible. We kind of consider ourselves the disinformation assistance for trans people in Ohio, because we are always going to say what's correct. I know that can sound a little obnoxious, but we put a lot of time and effort into making sure we are sharing correct information. We also know how much people trust us to be giving them correct information.

For the Cleveland clinic stuff, our main conversation moving forward is what we can do about it? HB68 is still in active litigation, but even if that litigation ends up going our way, then we now have this settlement in place that will affect Cleveland clinic in perpetuity for 20 years. There's nothing that the courts can do about that. What we can do is make Cleveland Clinic look like idiots for complying in an effort to have no other hospital want to comply excessively in the way that they have. They did not NEED to

Illustration by Kami Pankey



make this settlement. We don't want our hospitals caving into the Department of Justice, not about trans healthcare, and not about anyone's healthcare. Coming back to talking about things good allies can do: Allies who have financial power are the ones that end up getting listened to. This is a great moment for those people to step up and talk to the hospitals and say that we don't want this kind of compliance. The Cleveland Clinic has made a very intentional choice about who they want to be as a medical leader, not just in Ohio but globally, and they should be shamed for it.

Do people often reach out to your organization for clarity regarding these things? If so, in what manner?

I think it depends what kind of clarity folks are looking for. We definitely have a fairly substantial social media footprint. Regardless of my personal opinion of social media, it is still a very efficient and active way of getting information out, especially in some more rural areas. When we've had complex bill conversations, we'll have discord sessions for open community discussion about potential impacts, potential contingency planning, and generally just answering questions. People also reach out to us with more personal questions. You can reach out via email, messenger, and different chats on various platforms. We don't recommend approaching myself, or any of our board members if you see us just trying to exist as a queer person out in the world please. Our main inbox transohio@transohio.org is a good one.

Aside from the plethora of information that your own organization provides, what other organizations or resources do you often find yourself recommending to trans individuals struggling with staying informed about their rights?

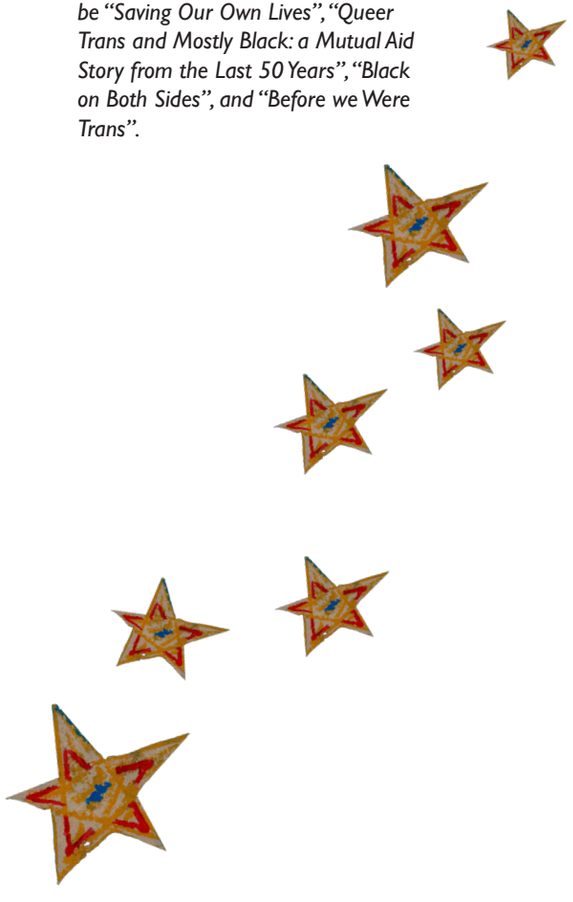
In Cincinnati specifically, Transform provides some really fantastic support services, groups, social programming, or even their free closet. Trans Masc Cincy is [another group] really focusing on trans youth. They have some really great support groups for masc presenting folks. In terms of other places for staying on top of the ever-changing landscape of things, Advocates for Trans Equality (A4TE) nationally advocates for trans rights. They have great information, particularly other kinds of guides existing outside of Ohio. If folks were born in other places sometimes we will send them over to A4TE's guides.

In your mission you also mention providing social activities that are inclusive and foster pride in the Ohio transgender community. What can someone who might be anxious about attending these events expect from them? What's a specific and successful activity that you've put together?

We are in the 27th year of our annual gathering, the TransOhio Symposium. We are actually having it in Cincinnati this year for the first time. It's the gathering of about 200-400 trans people over the course of a weekend. It's a really unique kind of environment. There aren't a lot of other opportunities to have a social and informational sharing community meal with that many other trans people. When we're looking at what a successful symposium would look like, it sometimes can be very overwhelming. We have people that come and it's their first time presenting as themselves in a community space. We have people who it's their first time meeting other trans people. We have folks who drive in from other states with a parent or friends because they don't have anything like this near them. We really take responsibility in knowing the kind of safe space that we're trying to create. It's all community and trans driven. There's always a lot of food and quiet spaces. It's super accessible for people to just relax and take a sec, and you can come and go as you please. This is a core program for us and a major undertaking.

With this magazine we are focused on reaching trans youth. What personal advice do you find yourself giving to trans youth that are particularly struggling with fear and acceptance right now?

I don't think there's one perfect thing to say, just because everyone's experience with their understanding of their gender is so different from person to person. Speaking personally for what I would have said to my younger self is that being unapologetic sooner is extremely freeing. For people that don't have accepting families it can be so complicated, but giving yourself permission to exist with multiple feelings at once is also okay. You can be frustrated with a parent, and also love them, and also want to be respected, and also be okay with having all those complex feelings and knowing exactly who you are at the same time. It doesn't have to be binary, just like our genders don't have to be binary. It's okay to give yourself permission to evolve and grow and change. I would also strongly encourage reading queer history, because I know I didn't learn ANY in school. My three favorite quick crash course recommendations would be "Saving Our Own Lives", "Queer Trans and Mostly Black: a Mutual Aid Story from the Last 50 Years", "Black on Both Sides", and "Before we Were Trans".





Illustrations by Cocoa Durrett

Social or Sober? Trans Cincinnatians Are Forced to Make a Choice

BY: HARPER THOMSON

In summer 2026, I spent a few weeks researching Cincinnati's queer nightlife and social events. While doing so, two questions continued to peak my interest: Where exactly do the sober members of our community spend their time, and do they ever feel excluded from nightlife and social spaces due to their sobriety? I set out to speak to individuals who could answer these questions, specifically those who identified as both transgender and sober. In an attempt to bring light to some exclusionary sentiments experienced in bar and club culture, I open these questions to you, the reader. Conducting interviews on the subject in person however, revealed to me that many share the same opinion as I do surrounding queer community events in Cincinnati. Many events found in our local queer community, I've found to be generally centered around bar and club culture. Those who don't participate in substance use can often feel as if they are forced to stand on the sidelines while trying to participate in these events.

Take a look at some recent event calendars for queer events in Cincinnati. You may notice that the majority of them take place in a bar or other 21+ spaces. Midwestern Lesbian's Cincy Gay Agenda for example states that, for the week of July 6th through July 12th 2026, five out of seven events listed are located at bars, clubs, or breweries. These places are largely centered around the consumption of alcohol, and largely host our queer gatherings. Logically speaking, sober individuals usually understand that they may attend these events without participating in alcohol use. The concern lies in the continuous gathering in these types of establishments where drinking is typically a main activity. Shouldn't queer people have an equal amount, or more options for community activities that aren't centered around substance use?

Long nights spent drunk or high have become normal for many. I commonly find it hard to walk into a club anywhere in Cincinnati and find someone sober to socialize with on the dance floor. This can make it very challenging for the sober members of the LGBTQ+ community in our city to find inclusion at these events. It can feel

as if you have fallen to the sidelines, fighting an internal battle and ultimately having to make a decision about substance use. I personally am always wondering: would I fit in better here in Cincinnati if I wasn't sober? How do I have fun with my community without the expectation to participate in substance use? For those of us who spend nights out acting as the perpetual designated driver, where do we fit in?

I found solace in Spyder, age 25, as we met to speak in the basement of the Northside Library. She is a member of a local punk band called Badman, and as a result spends plenty of time in bars and DIY venues across the city. As you can imagine, she finds herself often rubbing elbows with other regular clubgoers. One thing distinguishing herself from the other "regular clubgoers" is the simple fact that she doesn't drink. Spyder continues to be an active participant in Cincinnati's queer nightlife, but she also cites that she often feels the pressure to conform. She explains that she feels as if Cincinnati's nightlife scene is highly substance centered. She states that "maybe it comes down to everybody's own social anxiety… I think if we had a more level playing field, where drugs and alcohol weren't an expectation...you would find people who wanted to spend time there". I asked her what types of alcohol and drug-free events and spaces she would like to see in our city. She suggested events such as community dinners (not only because there is no pressure to use substances in places like these), but also because members of the community who don't have consistent access to hot food can gather here without the expectation to pay a cover fee. She also noted that she had an idea in the past to start a queer skate club here in Cincinnati, either at a roller rink or local skate park. Both of these are amazing ideas that create a sober space for queer people to gather, with activities that value social interaction over substance use.

I continued to speak with Hugh, age 24, about our shared experiences with substance use and community expectations. Hugh uses medical marijuana for chronic pain, but over the last year has decided to abstain from alcohol. While discussing the pressure we felt from our peers in Cincinnati specifically, Hugh cited his frustrations: "There's no big explanation, I just don't want to [drink], and that kind of answer is not acceptable to a lot of people." In his opinion, alcohol is often used as a "social lubricant" in situations like nightclubs and bars. Oftentimes, there's just an expectation that you're going to participate. I asked Hugh the same question I asked Spyder about what kinds of sober spaces in Cincinnati he would like to see. He mentioned that creative outdoor events like the YART (yard art) Sale in Northside have been a safe haven for him. He, and myself, would like to see more creative events like those, specifically events that are lower effort, self-led, and easily accessible. He continues to state that:

"I think there needs to be more casual community events. I think that people are under the assumption that everything needs to be big and super elaborate, and it's like, you could just have a weekly meeting where you and your friends hang out at a park pavilion and make crafts, and that would be a safe space."

As many of us are longing for low-effort social spaces to foster community while keeping ourselves sober, conversations like this are extremely important. In future years, I hope that we can begin to see an uptick in events that exist outside the bar. As I see it, these spaces would only create safer community based environments for those of us who choose to abstain from substances. As a sober person myself, I couldn't agree more with Spyder and Hugh about the social pressures we find ourselves facing, and what we as a community can do to counteract it.

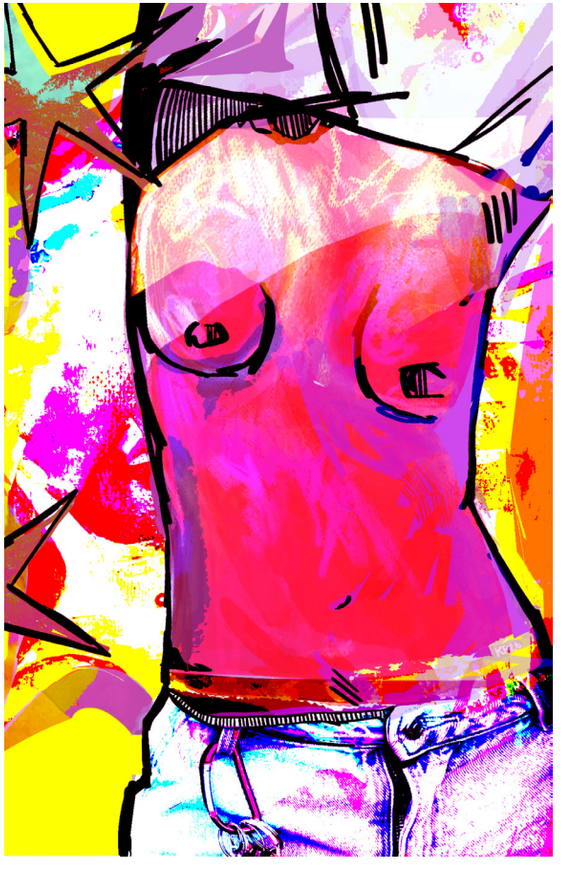


Illustration by Kami Pankey

Konya, Turkey to Cincinnati: Rebuilding Yourself

AN INTERVIEW WITH JUDE CIRIS

Jude Ciris is a 21-year-old transmasculine man living in Cincinnati, attending Northern Kentucky University, and working full time in supply chain management. Originally from Konya, Turkey, Jude survived conversion therapy as a teenager before his family sought asylum in the U.S. and he began his own transition in Cincinnati. In this interview from July 2026, he talks about that journey and the community that has held him together. He also shares about his partner Murry Foust, a transgender art student who went missing in early 2026 and was later found dead in Wilder, Kentucky.

Coming Out in Turkey:

I was in Turkey until I was 18. Growing up, I was raised Muslim, and my parents were pretty strict, in terms of religion especially. Growing up as a girl was tough because of the gendered expectations you get, and I was the oldest, too. I had less freedom than I would've liked. I realized I was transgender when I was about 12. I do remember coming out. Unfortunately, that ended up getting me sent to conversion therapy around when I was 14.

It's not great to be transgender in Turkey. But I'll say it wasn't the absolute worst, either. There wasn't any moral panic about transgender people at the time. Most people just didn't really know we existed. I went to boarding school, and when I told my classmates, the general reaction was just like, "Oh, okay. Really?" The kids my age hadn't been taught to be bigoted yet.

My teachers were actually pretty supportive. I did almost get expelled once because the principal was worried about me being in the girls' dorm, but conversion therapy ended up being the "slip" they gave me to stay in school.

I came out to my mom first, around 2016 or 2017, when I was 14. At the time, my dad was in jail. There'd been a coup in Turkey, and they started taking people without trial. He was one of them. So my mom told him I was in conversion therapy for depression, and he never really knew I was trans.

I ended up lying my way out of [conversion therapy] after about half a year. It was mostly talk therapy, and it was strange. It felt like nothing was happening and like a lot was happening all at once. You have this authority figure treating you like you're ill, and it gets to you. I think conversion therapy, no matter the degree, takes a part of you with it, and it's really hard to get that part back. What got to me most wasn't even the therapist himself, but the stories he'd tell about his other patients. [He told me a story] about a young trans woman he prescribed testosterone to to "correct her imbalance." He'd also tell me how much better I was doing than the others, and remember, I was lying my way through. I still think about those other patients sometimes. One was a transmasculine patient who turned to prayer because he wasn't being "healed." I feel lucky to have gotten out and moved here. It gives me a kind of survivor's guilt, thinking about people who don't have the same access to care.

Honestly, I think the therapist believed he was a lot smarter than he was. He'd ask things like, "Why do you feel like you're a man? Is it because you don't have a father?" And I'd just go, "Yeah, you got me. Can I go?" The dumbest part was this multiple-choice "gender" test he made me take. Afterward he told me, "Sometimes I do think transgender people are real. But I don't think you are, because you care about your hair too much. That's kind of a girl trait, isn't it?"

When I left conversion therapy, I never brought up being trans with my family again. I recently told my mom I'm taking hormones. It didn't go great, but she's less hostile about it now than she was at 14. Back then she had more control over me. Now it's more like, "Please don't do this." I don't know where those conversations [will] go from here.

Moving to Cincinnati and Finding Community:

My dad got asylum in the U.S., and we moved to Northern Kentucky as refugees through a family connection program the day after I turned 18. I had to chaperone my little sisters, then moved into Cincinnati on my own. After that, I was able to socially transition more, because there's just a lot more here. There's obviously a moral panic about transgender people in the U.S., but I also feel accepted. In Turkey, at least while I was there, no one's going to go out of their way to attack you. They just ignore you. Turkish doesn't even have [gendered] pronouns, so that wasn't really a concern. But people still just ignore you. Coming to the U.S. was the first time I actually got to meet other trans people. I found support groups and get-togethers, made friends, and met people older than me who'd gone through similar things. They guided me through starting testosterone, getting through challenges, scheduling surgery.

Meeting Murry:

I met Murry at a Trans Masc Cincy get-together. He approached me. I wasn't that into him at first and thought he was kind of weird. But we started hanging out and skipped the "friends" period entirely. We went almost straight into dating.

We spent nearly every day together. I don't think we were ever apart more than three days, except for school or work. He was my first boyfriend, and we had a lot in common. We'd talk about art, about things we wanted to do together. We were both hustlers, honestly, just doing our best to support each other through school. He'd stop by my apartment to walk my dog. We cooked for each other. When I had

time, I'd bring him food at his studio and help with his projects. Just regular relationship stuff.

He asked me out on Christmas Day [2025]. We were walking around downtown Cincinnati, it was [so] empty. He said, "I've just been telling people you're my boyfriend." I said, "Okay, dude, no one even asks anyone out these days, I guess." He said, "Well, do you want me to ask you?" So I said, "Well, if you're already telling people..." We were both in pajama pants, sharing a joint, walking the dog. He got down on one knee in the middle of the wet, cold street, joint still in his mouth, and said, "Do you want to go out with me?" I just said, "Get up! Oh my god." We actually talked about it properly once we got home. He was a really funny guy.

Another big memory was at his art show this past April [2026]. I remember he worked so hard for it and it was a really great time. I remember he was talking about what he was going to do next. He was talking about how happy he was that I could make it.

Another memory was in February [2026] when we had that big snow [storm]. We spent that weekend together and it was a really great time. I went out and bought a bunch of cheese and wine to have with us during that weekend. Yeah, that was a great time.

On Grief:

Some of these memories almost don't feel real. I'll admit I didn't know him very long. Maybe six months. Some days it feels like our relationship didn't even happen. Other days it doesn't feel like there was anything before I met him. It's this strange thing, knowing someone for so little time and having them matter so much. It's its own kind of dilemma. It's also unique that we were both trans.

I never realized until this happened how weird people get when someone dies. We met through Trans Masc Cincy, which still meets monthly, and I try to keep going, but there's sometimes a strange air [in community spaces], which I get. My closer friends are great about it. It's almost harder to talk to new people now, because this huge thing happened to me and they don't even know. I'll be talking to someone new and thinking, "Man, this guy doesn't even know." Then I remind myself I don't know what he's going through either. Grief feels like something's broken in you and everyone can tell. I started a new job about a month and a half after Murry died and kept thinking people could see that something was wrong [with me]. But they can't. They don't even know me. I also feel trauma-bonded to some friends now. In one sense it brought us closer, in another it doesn't matter much, because Murry was my best friend.

Everyone knew Murry. Everyone was friends with Murry. He was the cool art student, and I was the geek boyfriend. I was the one dating a celebrity.

I got top surgery and had my butt done while Murry was still missing, because they were already scheduled. Just picture the most pathetic person you've ever seen, wrapped top to bottom like a shawarma. [After he was found], I had friends who took me in. I didn't go back to my own apartment for over a month, because we'd basically been living together. Friends got me out of bed, took over caring for my dog, drove me to doctor's appointments, handled my medicine, helped with my bandage changes, brought me food. When I was ready to go home, friends helped me sort through his things.

I've gotten into religion a little since he passed. I was an atheist for about ten years and didn't believe in an afterlife, but once someone you love dies, you have to make up your mind about that. I've been going to an Episcopal church, and they've been really welcoming. They have a pastor with tattoos who has been helping me a lot. I hadn't really talked to anyone before who I thought was both smart and religious. It's new for me.



Jude Ciris by Harper Thomson
holding a painting by Murry Foust

There's no book telling you what to do when you're 21 and your boyfriend kills himself. Every situation is so unique, and I won't pretend I've gotten my footing back. It's really just one day at a time. What's helped is journaling. I write down things I know are true, because [during grief] your brain goes into overdrive and you can lose your grip on reality. So I'll write: "it was his decision. We're all going to die someday." It sounds mundane, even cringe, but writing "I'm still alive, it's not my fault" really does help. And give community a chance, even when it feels stupid or useless. Even when someone tells you to go take a walk and you're like "shut up," if you do it it does help.

Murry's Art:

Murry used to have me take pictures of all kinds of things to use as references for his paintings. My phone is still full of random reference photos. For one piece, he had me tie his wrists up and take a picture. He painted it and told me it was for me. His parents got it from his studio for me afterward. It's really pretty.

If you or someone you know is struggling:

Trans Lifeline: 877-565-8860

The Trevor Project: 1-866-488-7386, or text START to 678-678

Crisis Text Line:text HOME to 741741

Artist and Writer Bios







Clockwise from top left:
Nyla Davies
Christina Sifri
Harper Thomson

Nyla Davies is a 21-year-old, nonbinary artist based in Cincinnati. They're in their senior year at the Art Academy of Cincinnati, currently pursuing their Bachelor of Fine Arts. They're interested in creative writing and journalism as well as the visual arts. This project is their very first editorial role.

they/them

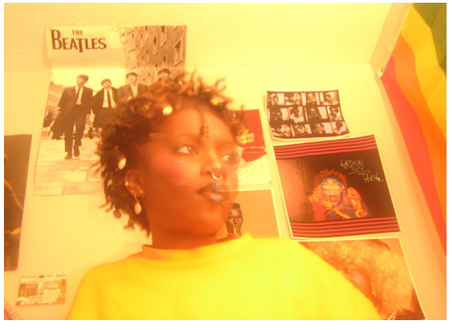
Christina Sifri is a multidisciplinary fine artist based in Cincinnati, Ohio. Sifri's process addresses the contemporary complexity of identifying as a Queer Palestinian-Lebanese person living in exile in America through symbolizing reclamation, grief, community, and collective liberation.

they/them يَ ه

Harper Thomson is a butch lesbian multidisciplinary artist and recent graduate of the Art Academy of Cincinnati. Her preferred topics in writing are usually art history-related, but for the issue of this magazine she is trying her hand at journalistic writing based around Cincinnati's queer scene. In her free time, Harper enjoys frequenting yard sales and listening to local music in bars across the city.

she/her

Artist and Writer Bios







Clockwise from top left:
Cocoa Durrett
Avery Smith
Eddy Risimini

Cocoa Durrett is an artist, living in Cincinnati Ohio. They grew up as a painter in Louisville, KY. Recently, their artwork has begun to be taken over by strange looking multicolored characters who have no interest in smiling. They will continue to express them until they find a reason for their existence.

they/them

Avery Smith is a third year law student at the University of Cincinnati College of Law. She has spent the past two summers interning at the Ohio Justice & Policy Center and plans to apply for a fellowship to help human trafficking survivors obtain debt relief. She has also previously worked for the law school's domestic violence and protection order clinic. She plans to use her legal degree to help as many trans people as she possibly can.

she/her

Eddy Risimini is a native Kentuckian working towards a bachelor's degree in fine arts at the University of Cincinnati. His work focuses on queer activism and the importance of community and self-expression through the perspective of a transgender man. Currently, he is exploring a different method of reaching his community by taking a journalistic approach to his artistic career

he/him

Artist and Writer Bios



Arlo Grimaldi is currently studying Anthropology and Fashion Design at University of Cincinnati. In her studies, she loves to find the intersections between fashion, trend cycles, and queer identities as they work towards their goal of being a trend forecasting specialist. She works to understand how a rapidly evolving world and the identities of those who make up that world shape global fashion trends and market changes.

she/her/they/them

Sav Hoyt is a mixed media animator, illustrator, and conceptualizer who loves to merge the world of cartoons with the emotions of human life using bold shapes, colors, and textures.

he/him





Clockwise from top left:
Arlo Grimaldi
Sav Hoyt
Kami Pankey

Kami Pankey is a black lesbian artist born and raised in Cincinnati. Many of their artworks are within the mixed media medium and aim to create an emotional experience for the viewer. Their artwork encompasses many topics such as identity and the anxiety associated with it. Being nonbinary is an integral part of their lesbian identity and who they are as an artist. Their experience with their identity is what inspires them to create art, as well as art that is representative of their mental health struggles.

they/them

Artist and Writer Bios



Ian Melodean Juniper Johnson is published in a third of all midwest states. Ian wishes to spread their joy in the queer community. They create art about community and connection. Their creation is compulsive and longs to be inflammatory, comforting or even revealing to those that look beyond the surface level.

they/them

Kaiden Jacques is a Cincinnati-based illustrator who is a barista by day and artist at night. Known for collaborations with local businesses, Kaiden focuses his work on adding a queer light where it is needed. When not creating, you may find him hiding in a coffee shop until the weather is just right.

he/him



Clockwise from top left:
Ian Johnson
Kaiden Jacques

FEATURING:

Emil Wiersma is a figurative artist working in painting and printmaking. Wiersma's art captures the intimacy and complexity of the human body. He graduated with a B.F.A. from Miami University in 2022 and has continued in the arts as Tiger Lily Press's Artist In Resident for 2026. In addition, his involvement expands to volunteering with Trans Masc Cincy and Manifest Drawing Center.

he/him/theirs

Queer Cincinnati:

BEYOND THE BINARY

A free magazine made by and for Cincinnati's trans and nonbinary youth.

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Managed by regional LGBTQ+ nonprofit publisher Queer Kentucky.
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