

Sara Bowen-Laisi (she/her)

Serving on the board is important to me because I live and work in a rural area. As a queer person raising queer children, I understand both the importance of access to healthcare for our community as well as the barriers. The barriers are further exemplified every day through my work, making equitable access to health care and preventative health for rural LGBTQ+ folks of even greater personal significance.

Cassandra Coffey (she/her/they/them)

Cassandra is a forty year old transgender woman who has been involved in regional queer activism since 2018. She works as a social media manager and is a Political Science major at John A. Logan College. Originally from Kentucky, Cassandra has lived and organized in Southern Illinois, Western Kentucky, and Southwest Indiana.

Jonna J. Cooley, PhD (she/her)

Dr. Cooley has been in social services for 38 years, serving as the Executive Director of Phoenix Center for the past 18 years. She is a member of Governor Pritzker's Children and Family Advisory Council, IL Treasurer Michael Frerich's Multicultural Advisory Board, the FBI Multicultural Advisory Committee, the Heartland Continuum of Care Board of Directors and serves on the statewide "Getting to Zero" housing committee.

"I grew up in a rural area and as the Director of an LGBTQ+ agency and a person who is part of the LGBTQ+ community, addressing health disparities is a priority. Equally important is that the services that are available are open and welcoming to all and that individuals living in the rural areas have access to the services they need. The Phoenix Center team works to address these needs through our mobile and fixed outreach in the rural areas of 15 Central Illinois counties."

Macy Ferguson-Smith (she/they)

Macy is a Behavioral Health Therapist and Senior DEI/Health Equity Advisor at Quincy Medical Group. Macy received their MSW from Saint Louis University in 2017 and is a current student of the Doctor of Education program at Western Illinois University. She has a passion for advocacy, community building, and eliminating health disparities for historically excluded populations. In August of 2023, Macy was announced as part of the Obama Foundation's Inaugural Cohort of the Leaders USA program. Macy believes by participating on the ruralHarmony CAB, they are uplifting LGBTQ+ voices from the West-

Central Illinois area to make affirming and inclusive care the standard for all humans. Org Affiliations: Quincy Medical Group Foundation Board, Jackson-Lincoln Pool Board, Safe & Livable Housing Committee, Former Quincy Human Rights Commission, Impact Global Advisory Committee.

Spencer LeStrange (he/him)

Spencer is a 34 year old transgender man living in Springfield, IL. He is originally from Concord, IL and a 2007 graduate of Triopia High School. When asked why he wished to serve on the board he said: "As an LGBTQIA+ rural Illinois resident for the majority of my life, it means a lot to me to serve on the board. Being able to address the issues of a group of people (myself included) often overlooked in the medical field is definitely a way I would love to help my community."

Scott Linde (he/him)

Director of Development for AgeLinc, the Area Agency for Aging for Lincolnland. I hold a weekly PrideLinc Luncheon/Group, serving LGBTQ Seniors 60 years and older. In order to serve this group, I felt the need to stay abreast of relevant issues in our community and surrounding counties.

Kim Needham (they/them)

Raised in a military family, Kim gleaned a love for travel and diversity as a young art lover. They studied many art forms but always had a love for photography and honed their skills on the streets of New Orleans. Photographing national parks, local farms, families, children's milestones, bands, and live performances. Recent artwork explores LGBTQIA+ identities and seeks to embrace and empower people in those communities. Kim is currently on the board of Rainbow Cafe LGBTQ Center in Carbondale Illinois, a community action board member of Rural Harmony, and also volunteers for many other LGBT and Human Rights events.

Brian Sylvester (he/him), President, Coalition of Rainbow Alliances

While the medical field may be considered one of the most educated, there are those who have a ways to go in learning how to work with members of the LGBTQIA community. While I've heard this issue arises mostly for transgender individuals currently, there has always been a veiled disconnect between some of those in the medical field and the "gay" demographic. As a member of that "gay" population, I would like to think the work that RuralHarmony is doing is exactly what is needed to address these issues and remediate them moving forward.

Justin Walker (he/him)

"I have been conducting and overseeing clinical research for 8 years and am especially passionate about ensuring the LGBTQIA+ community has equal access to healthcare and improving health literacy. Most currently, I work to assist gene therapy/rare disease clinical research protocols through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. I find immense value in being asked to participate in something that has the potential to create a lasting, beneficial effect in our community."

Rex Wyatt (they/them)

Social Worker committed to working with trans and gender-diverse clients. They are committed to helping folx engage in physical and mental healthcare services. They find this work important because they see the lack of engagement in healthcare that LGBTQIA+ folx have due to spaces that need improvement to provide inclusive and trauma-informed services.