

NJCASA PRIDE: A Conversation about Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth and Minors
Interviewee Biographies

Jesselly De La Cruz

Jesselly De La Cruz, BA in Political Science (Rider University), MSW (Rutgers University), and DSW (Rutgers University), is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in NJ. She completed a Post-Graduate Certificate in Family Therapy at The Multicultural Family Institute, Inc. in Highland Park, NJ. Having originated from an underprivileged background and being a child of an immigrant family herself, Dr. De La Cruz's education and work have been motivated by her desire to support traditionally underserved populations. Toward that overarching goal, she has worked with Latino advocacy nonprofit agencies. She currently serves as Executive Director for the Latino Action Network Foundation.

Queer Fun Fact:

Huge lesbian controversy: I didn't watch L-Word until 2020 but I knew Jenni had bipolar disorder and what those weird circus scenes were about in the 1st season. My wife hates that I resolved a 10-year argument that lesbians were having in 3 episodes.

Ashante Taylorcox

Ashante is a dynamic speaker, survivor-leader, clinician, and Black changemaker from NJ with a passion for creating safer environments and systems of care for BIPOC and LGBTQ+ survivors of trafficking. As the Founder and Executive Director of You Are More Than Inc, she is a nationally recognized expert in racial and gender justice and, over the last ten years, has worked diligently to improve the lives of marginalized survivors of domestic trafficking and the commercial sex industry nationally. Ashante is a Licensed Professional Counselor with a master's degree in counseling for mental health and wellness and a post-master's advanced certificate in LGBT health, education, and social services from New York University. In 2022, she was awarded the Visionary Voice Awards by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, Arbor Brothers 2021 - 2022 Leaders of Color, and is a 2021 Echoing Green Fellow.

Queer Fun Fact:

I am the definition of the queer cat lady that people imagine - I have six cats and 2 dogs and it's an amazing life to live :D

Elizabeth Schedl

Elizabeth Schedl is the Executive Director of Hudson Pride Center, where she has worked since 2013, previously serving as COO and Deputy Director. She chairs the Early Identification of Individuals with HIV/AIDS Committee and is active in various community and advisory councils in Hudson County. Elizabeth holds a Bachelor's in Criminal Justice

and a Master's in International Relations from Fairleigh Dickinson University and lives in Jersey City with her wife, daughter, and dog.

Kayden Sarria

Hi folks, my name is Kayden(he/him/his). I am the LGBTIA+ Gender Affirming Clinician at YWCA Northern New Jersey's healingSPACE, Bergen County's only sexual violence resource center. healingSPACE—is a safe and welcoming place for survivors of sexual violence and their loved ones. Trained advocates provide individual counseling, facilitate support groups, and accompany survivors through medical, legal, and other proceedings associated with sexual violence. 24/7 support is available to anyone who has been affected by sexual violence, whether it happened hours or years ago.

Quadeer Porter

Quadeer Porter, MHA, a Newark native, is a dedicated community leader and advocate. He graduated from Rutgers University in 2013 with a bachelor's degree in public health and earned his first master's degree in healthcare administration from Walden University in May 2018. He is pursuing a second master's degree in social work from Rutgers University School of Social Work.

A unique and defining moment in Quadeer's life was his public coming out as a queer male in 2015. After graduating from college in 2013, Quadeer's best friend asked if he knew anyone comfortable with being on an LGBTQ panel discussing the Divine Nine. Quadeer volunteered himself for the panel, marking his public coming out. He informed his fraternity brothers just days before the panel, surprising many of them. Quadeer is a proud member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated and continues to advocate for the rights and equality of all individuals, regardless of their sexuality, race, gender, or creed. Quadeer founded Brothers Building a Better Nation (BBABN) on September 10, 2020, a nonprofit dedicated to dismantling systemic barriers for Black, Indigenous, and Men of Color. BBABN provides essential services such as employment, counseling, legal aid, and healthcare.

One of Quadeer's favorite books is "Revolutionary Suicide" by Huey P. Newton. The quote, "Revolutionary suicide does not mean that I and my comrades have a death wish; it means just the opposite. We have such a strong desire to live with hope and human dignity that existence without them is impossible," resonates deeply with Quadeer, reflecting the BIPOC queer struggle for equality and dignity. Quadeer's biggest influences are his mom Shelley D. Porter, MSW, his aunt Tammy Miller-Owens, his cousin Tanisha Porter, RN, and his little brothers Jhalil Porter and Derrick Hughes Jr. His dream is to open a federally qualified health center specializing in BIPOC men's health, which also serves as a transitional housing facility. His leadership and advocacy continue to inspire and drive meaningful change.