

Portraits In PRIDE



**Children's Hospital
of Philadelphia®**

Pathology & Laboratory Medicine

“Never be bullied into silence. Never allow yourself to be made a victim. Accept no one’s definition of your life; **define yourself.**”

- Harvey Fierstein





LGBTQ+ Pride Month is celebrated throughout the month of June to commemorate the 1967 Stonewall Riots in Manhattan, NY, and serves as a time for the LGBTQ+ community and their allies to celebrate diversity and acknowledge a continued fight for equity, equality, and inclusion.

Not only is Pride important in the month of June, it has significant importance throughout the year as we celebrate how far the LGBTQ+ community has come in their fight for equity and inclusion. Each LGBTQ+ person has navigated an incredible journey to get where they are today. The DEI Committee in The Department of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine at CHOP is honored to highlight the stories of some of our own LGBTQ+ staff members – and their allies – with you in this booklet. Our hope is that by sharing these stories we will continue to build a foundation of inclusion, and help educate and inspire our PLM community members to speak up as advocates for LGBTQ+ people. True equality can only be achieved if allies join with members of the community to ensure that progress is made every day.

CHOP is committed to inclusion for the LGBTQ+ community through clinical programs, employee resource groups and other initiatives, such as employing the Workday functionality that allows employees to set pronouns. CHOP's investment in the Office of Diversity & Inclusion has allowed for there to be foundation and resources to support the LGBTQ+ Pride employee resource group. Take a few moments to check out the [Pride ERG on @CHOP here!](#)

We hope you enjoy learning more about your LGBTQ+ colleagues, and we encourage you to get involved in your own community as we continue the fight for LGBTQ+ equality and inclusion.



Rebecca Harris IDDL



Tell us a little bit about yourself, and your journey coming out as an LGBTQ+ person.

I spent the first 25 years of my life in South Carolina. I didn't know any gay women growing up. Or if I did, it wasn't something they talked about openly. My parents were supportive of LGBTQ+ rights, but their support was anomalous for that time and place. "That's gay" meant "that's bad," and kids used homophobic slurs casually. I only figured things out as an adult and started to come out two years ago. It turns out, a lot of other stuff was about to happen. Coming out was only the fourth most stressful thing I experienced that year. Still, coming out as an adult meant upending much of my life and starting a new one. It was hard on my mental health. Online communities of other "late bloomers" have been helpful to me since I had limited access to in-person communities.

Was there anyone in your life you looked up to as you navigated coming out?

I had a younger family member come out before me. I felt guilty I had not come out sooner, like I should have been the first one to shoulder that burden of coming out in our family. But she responded with nothing but love and support. And if she could do it, I could do it. I didn't have to feel alone.

What brought you to CHOP, and what is your favorite part about the work you do?

I trained to be a medical microbiologist, but I was more of a clinical pathology generalist at my previous job. I knew I wanted to return to microbiology, and the opportunity to direct a lab at a place like CHOP was too good to pass up. There are two things I've always loved about microbiology. The first is the amount of involvement we have with the care teams managing individual patients. I love learning about our patients and the impact our work is having. The second is how the field of microbiology changes with the microorganisms; it's never dull, even

when the microorganisms aren't altering the course of human history.

How do you think we can build a better atmosphere of inclusion within the Department of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine?

Inclusive language has a big impact. If you are coded as straight but aren't, you choose between coming out or lying, at least by omission, when people make presumptions. I make this choice, at least weekly, in casual conversations when new people assume I have a male partner. It is an enormous relief if they use inclusive language instead. I feel comfortable being myself without internal debate. To the same end, I'm trying to be more consistent with sharing my pronouns and not making assumptions about gender or identity.

If you could go back in time and give your 16-year old self one piece of advice, what would it be?

"Put your wellbeing first," but I would like to write it on the back of a printout of our SARS-CoV-2 PCR validation if that is allowed.



Kevin Kelso Core Lab



Tell us a little bit about yourself, and your journey coming out as an LGBTQ+ person.

My name is Kevin Kelso, I am 27 years old, and I am pansexual! I've been out for about 9 years, and I've never looked back. I came out to my mom shortly after confessing my love to a (sadly) heterosexual (at the time) man, and all the guilt and fear that I had bottled up was immediately washed away with love and acceptance. I've been truly blessed to have the support I have received from my friends and family.

Was there anyone in your life you looked up to as you navigated coming out?

As a singer, I have been surrounded by members of the LGBTQ+ community for many years in the community of the arts. My first exposure to a gay person was my choir director Darryl Roland in a professional choir school I was a member of in Wilmington, DE when I was about 13 years old. He was excellent at his craft, and really inspired a multitude of young choristers who went on to be immensely successful as musicians and people. He was an adept musician and leader, and was well respected even among the religious community that this choir school was engrossed in. From there, I went on to meet many other LGBTQ+ peers and mentors in my middle/high school (Cab Calloway School of the Arts). All of these people showed me that it was okay to be gay, and that there is power in being your truest self.

What brought you to CHOP, and what is your favorite part about the work you do?

Ever since I graduated college, I knew that I wanted to live in Philadelphia. CHOP has a reputation for being an amazing institution, and I have a little cousin who received care here and had a wonderful experience. It seemed like a no-brainer to come here and do what I can to help these kids who need it most.

My favorite part about the work I do is all of the opportunities to get involved I get here in the CHOP lab. There are many ways to contribute to the development and the culture of the lab, and even at an entry level you really feel like you are making a long-term difference. Several projects that I have been involved with over my 2.5 years here have come to fruition and are part of our daily workflows to this day.

How do you think we can build a better atmosphere of inclusion within the Department of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine?

I think a good rule of thumb is to just be empathetic. Everyone has their own background and troubles, but they show up every day to work and help these kids just like you do. Being accepting and open-minded to everyone's story without passing judgement is a great way for staff to feel welcome and excel at the work they do.

If you could go back in time and give your 16-year old self one piece of advice, what would it be?

Oh, this feels just like Rupaul's Drag Race! I guess mainly I would say just be yourself and come out! Don't make your sexuality your darkest secret and carry that burden for any longer than you have to. Being authentic and free is the way to go, and there are brighter days coming for you and everyone like you soon. Also, you go to an arts school, and you sing and dance. No one will be surprised. You and your sister can talk about boys, it'll be fun!



Jason Roberts Outreach



Tell us a little bit about yourself, and your journey coming out as an LGBTQ+ person.

My name is Jason, and I grew up in a tiny town called Seminole, Texas where my family farmed cotton and peanuts and went to church every Sunday! Each summer when my friends and classmates were going on vacation or traveling to summer camp, I was out driving tractors and hoeing weeds; a character-building experience for sure! Growing up LGBTQ+ in west Texas in the late 1990's was a bit tricky, and I spent a large part of my childhood denying to myself, (and to others), that I was gay. Once I graduated high school, I had to break out and really find myself - as cliché as that sounds - and learn to be ok with the way God made me. I spent time living in the San Francisco Bay area and met a lot of interesting, new people as I tried to piece together my authentic self. When I finally came to terms with who I was, I came out to my immediate family - which proved a bit rocky. I guess my biggest realization throughout that process was you have to meet people where they are, and keep your expectations in check. We've all come around now - albeit slowly - and while views and attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community have largely changed for the better since I was a child, there is still much work to do.

Was there anyone in your life you looked up to as you navigated coming out?

Yes! My grandmother, who I lovingly grew up calling "GinGin", and Dolly Parton! My grandmother embodied this concept of universal, unconditional love - which was a really progressive stance for her to take given the various political and religious influences in 1990's Texas. GinGin was one of those magical, whimsical golden girls who could tell you anything and make it sound good, and cook you anything and make it taste good. Her brilliance was her ability to make you feel respected, appreciated, and valued. I will never forget feeling that kind of love and support. And Dolly? Well, Dolly is pretty much my fairy godmother - from the moment I turned 9 years old and saw her in 9 to 5, I was smitten! Dolly is an ambassador of universal good

will, AND an icon in the LGBTQ+ community! There's a lot we ALL can learn about being a better person from Dolly Parton.

What brought you to CHOP, and what is your favorite part about the work you do?

Before coming to CHOP, I spent 7 years working in marketing and advertising at The Walt Disney Company. I learned so much working at Disney, and made so many meaningful relationships. Anyone who knows me knows that I love the holiday season, and every year I host a big holiday gathering for my friends and colleagues. In 2010, I decided to make my party a charity benefit to help raise money for gifts for kids who were in Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children over the Christmas holidays. I worked with local businesses - including The Walt Disney Company! - to solicit donations, and we ended up raising more than \$10,000 to help make the holidays a bit more magical for the kids at Arnold Palmer. This type of purpose-driven work really motivates me, and I was inspired to apply for the outreach manager role at CHOP in early 2011. Over the past decade, we have built the outreach testing program into a multi-million dollar business, but more importantly, we have improved access to important testing performed in our clinical labs to patients beyond our Philadelphia location. We have such wonderfully talented leaders and staff in our department who are willing to think creatively, take risks, and dream big. I've loved being able to make an impact on the world through the work I have done building this program and I can't wait to see what comes next!

If you could go back in time and give your 16-year old self one piece of advice, what would it be?

It gets better. SO much better. And thankfully, botox and Juviderm will keep you looking your best for years to come!



Alison Muir Genomics



Tell us a little bit about yourself, and your journey coming out as an LGBTQ+ person.

Hi, I'm Alison. Currently, I am a fellow in the DGD. I have a wife and a toddler. My wife and I met in grad school at Wisconsin and then move to Seattle, ostensibly for PostDocs but really to take advantage of all the great hiking, skiing, and white-water rafting in the region. I came out when I met my wife. I wanted us to get serious and wasn't willing to lie about my relationship to my friends or family.

Was there anyone in your life you looked up to as you navigated coming out?

I have a lot of LGBTQ+ friends who all came out at about the same time, so we were all kind of in it together, supporting each other and learning from each other's mistakes.

What brought you to CHOP, and what is your favorite part about the work you do?

My wife, daughter, and I moved from Seattle to Philadelphia last summer so that I could participate in the Laboratory of Genetics and Genomics fellowship at CHOP. My favourite part of the work I do is how many different people I get to interact/work with each day. As a fellow, I do a little bit of everything, and it has been really wonderful meeting so many of the great people who work at CHOP.

How do you think we can build a better atmosphere of inclusion within the Department of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine?

I am really impressed by the inclusiveness at CHOP which has allowed me to be myself without worrying about how my orientation might affect my professional relationships. But there are still, unfortunately, a lot of workplaces where being openly LGBTQ can have a negative impact on your career, and it's not always obvious when you start a new job if being out is a good idea. Activities like this one help

to build a better atmosphere of inclusion by letting employees know that the PLM will support them if they choose to be out at work.

If you could go back in time and give your 16-year old self one piece of advice, what would it be?

Don't sweat about how things are going to turnout down the road. Do what makes you happy, and trust that things will turn out fine.



Becky Linn Pathology



Tell us a little bit about yourself, and your journey coming out as an LGBTQ+ person.

When I was a kid, my family moved around quite a bit, but we finally settled just outside of Houston, Texas when I was 10 years old. I knew I was different well before we moved to the South but could not articulate how or why I felt different until my close friends started dating. I realized I was gay, but I was so afraid of being different that I suppressed who I was to fit in with my friends and family. I just kind of went on being “straight” until halfway through college, when I started playing rugby and meeting other people in the LGBTQ community. When I started dating my first girlfriend, I came out to my family, who took a little while to understand that this was not “just a phase.” I was not entirely comfortable being out in all aspects of my life, particularly in medical school, until I met my wife almost 11 years ago at the Saint Louis Pride Parade. When we met, I was expending so much energy to conform to what I thought others wanted with disregard for my own happiness and mental health. Her unapologetic confidence in who she is, and her love and support has given me the courage and space to embrace being different. My journey for self-acceptance continues to evolve.

Pronouns: she/her/they

What brought you to CHOP, and what is your favorite part about the work you do?

I came to CHOP for pediatric pathology fellowship training and was given the opportunity to stay on as faculty. This is essentially my dream job! I have amazing access to a variety of perinatal specimens for evaluation and study. There are numerous opportunities to collaborate with colleagues both at CHOP and PENN learn more about how placental health impacts perinatal outcomes and beyond. I love to teach and pass on my excitement and knowledge to trainees about placenta and fetal physiology. I also have the opportunity to work with such amazing colleagues and staff who share the same

drive to provide excellent clinical care to our patients.

If you could go back in time and give your 16-year old self one piece of advice, what would it be?

Stop caring so much about what other people think and focus on your needs and happiness.



Sean Lawrence Core Lab



Tell us a little bit about yourself, and your journey coming out as an LGBTQ+ person.

My name is Sean Lawrence, and I work in the Core Lab on evening shift. I grew up near Lansdale in Montgomery County, and I've lived in Philly since 2012. I came out as gay during high school to my family and classmates. My mom works as a tax accountant, and that year I knew my chances to come out were running low for the year because her work gets seasonally heavy. I knew I couldn't wait, so I ended up coming out during a TV rerun of Shrek during the "ogres have layers" scene which is always a fun story to tell.

Was there anyone in your life you looked up to as you navigated coming out?

Growing up, and still to this day, I looked up to my uncle and his husband. They've been together as a couple longer than my parents have been and are a model partnership to me. Although, they've been living in California, they refused to marry until same-sex marriage was legal nationwide. Outside of family, there were very few public LGBTQ role models that I was exposed to. Most of the LGBTQ "people" I was exposed to were characters on sitcoms that were generally the butt of jokes. The huge increase in queer visibility since then, over the last 10 years, in all sorts of roles is a game changer for kids who might not be growing up in a supportive environment or family. Now more than ever the message is out there for people of all ages to know that there is a place in society for them to thrive socially and professionally and that they are not alone.

What brought you to CHOP, and what is your favorite part about the work you do?

My journey to CHOP started on a clinical rotation in the Microbiology Lab (pre-IDDL). At the time I was a bit disillusioned by some experience at other hospitals, but when I came to CHOP, I was happy

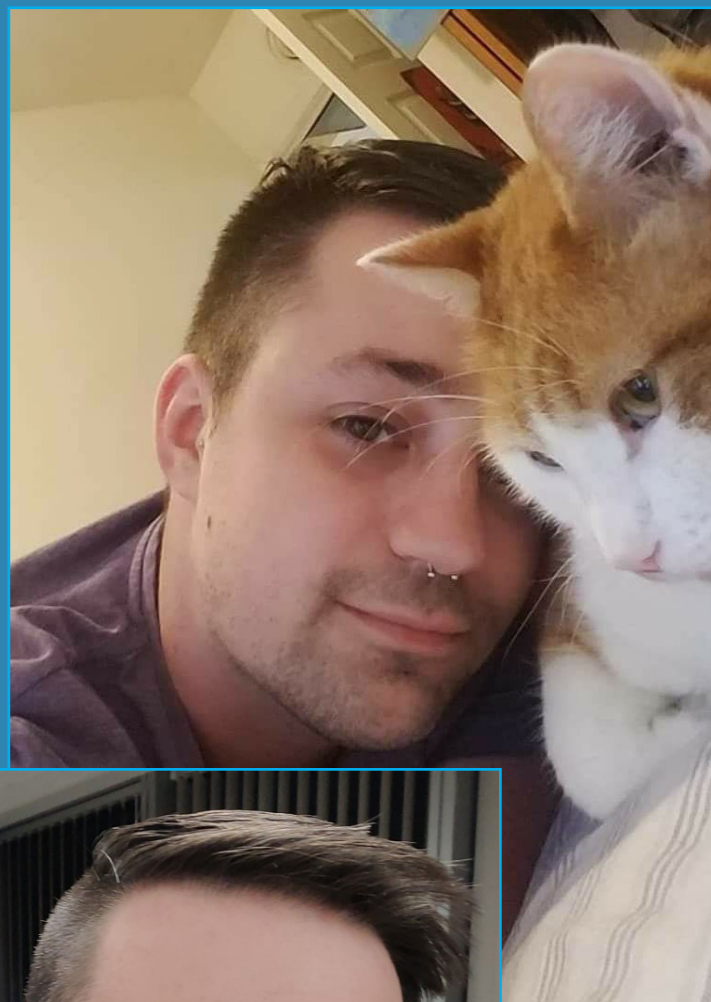
to find an inviting and supportive atmosphere. I came during the employee and patient talent show which was my first look at CHOP's effort at creating a good patient experience. My favorite part of what I do is knowing that I help kids every day, many of whom cannot yet help themselves or advocate for themselves.

How do you think we can build a better atmosphere of inclusion within the Department of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine?

Projects like this that increase visibility are helpful. It can be hard for LGBT people to meet in a fragmented workplace like a set of labs. We aren't always interacting outside of the same set of employees, and being LGBTQ isn't generally something you know about someone after briefly meeting. With more visibility, LGBTQ employees who might be feeling isolated can know they aren't alone here.

If you could go back in time and give your 16-year old self one piece of advice, what would it be?

Not to worry so much about the things you can't control, but focus on the things you can. Also you'll become a cat person so get used to that.



"I've had to stand up to all kinds of people through the years just to be myself. I **believe everybody should be free to be who they are, and to love who they love.**"

Polly 

