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re: Local nonprofit forms, focuses on LGBTQ+ center

OMAHA, NE - [Omaha ForUs](#) forms as a nonprofit organization centering the lived experience and unique needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) individuals & families of eastern Nebraska, western Iowa. With a mission to 'build intentional community and create equitable space,' Omaha ForUs aims to grow LGBTQ+ focused, culturally responsive programming in an Omaha-based center.

"We are channeling the collective power of Nebraska's existing LGBTQ+ led organizations and programming to improve support systems for our community," says Director of Programs, JohnCarl Denkovich. "By co-locating and coordinating efforts we strengthen proven work and begin bridging gaps in essential services."

Top of Omaha ForUs' service priorities is mental health, particularly difficult for many LGBTQ+ individuals to access. [A 2019 strengths and needs assessment of Omaha's LGBTQ+ community found four in five respondents had mental health concerns. A 2011 statewide health assessment reported nearly 50% of LGBTQ+ respondents had seriously considered suicide.](#) Omaha ForUs' Best Life program will offer LGBTQ+ affirming clinical counseling and facilitated support groups, housed at a forthcoming center.

Omaha is one of only seven of the country's top 50 cities not served by a metro LGBTQ+ center according to data compiled from [CenterLink](#), a national association partner for LGBTQ+ centers. Centers in Kansas City, Missouri may be closest in proximity, but at four hours round-trip commute, not a realistic option for Omaha and Council Bluffs residents.

Focus on an LGBTQ+ center gained momentum after a 2018 presentation to the Omaha LGBTQ+ Advisory Board, convened in 2017 by executive order. The body quickly prioritized the establishment of a LGBTQ+ center initiative. Mayor Jean Stothert lends her support to the project, initially approaching philanthropic donors for support and contributing \$15,000 in city funds to the organization's community support campaign. "This is one more way Omaha is growing and changing for the better. As a former nurse, I want all of us to get the care we need, and the support we deserve. I'm excited for LGBTQ+ people to have more opportunity to do just that," said Stothert.

Efforts to launch Omaha ForUs quickened after securing fiscal agency with [Heartland Family Service](#), a multi-service nonprofit agency providing care in Nebraska and western Iowa since 1875. “JohnCarl came to me with a plan, it made sense, our board of directors agreed, and we signed on,” said John Jeanetta, President & CEO of Heartland Family Service.

With this announcement, Omaha ForUs begins a community support campaign aimed at raising \$75,000 in 75 Days. “While \$75,000 is a fraction of what’s needed, this is how we activate our community and demonstrate a commitment to sustaining Omaha ForUs’ efforts,” says former Omaha Public Schools Board member, Amanda (Ryan) Crichlow Silva, Omaha ForUs’ first Board president. “We are also depending on generous philanthropic leaders to answer our call and invest in this project to create real, lasting change.”

While the goal is a fully equipped physical space to meet the diverse and evolving needs of LGBTQ+ people, that will take time. “I want to cut the ribbon and throw open the doors of a center tomorrow, but without a windfall financial gift, it’s not immediately possible,” says Denkovich. “We can’t build overnight what our community has needed for decades - we make positive impact and create forward momentum with help from our community.”

Omaha ForUs is preparing for temporary office space to pilot a co-location model with a small contingent of LGBTQ+ serving organizational partners as soon as late 2022, with details forthcoming.

To support Omaha ForUs’ Community Support #75k75day Campaign, visit <http://www.OmahaForUs.org/donate>.

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