

28th Annual
**QUEER YOUTH
LEADERSHIP AWARDS**

Honoring Queer Youth Leaders & Allies in Santa Cruz County



*Saturday May 10th 2025
Soquel High School, Soquel*

**QUEER
YOUTH
LEADERSHIP** awards



Mónica Morales
Health Services Agency Director

Raised in Watsonville, Mónica was a former recipient of the 1998 Queer Youth Leadership Awards, which she holds with great regard. She helped start Watsonville High School's first gay and lesbian support group.

In her role overseeing Santa Cruz County's Health Services Agency, Mónica continues to be deeply committed to community empowerment and transformation.

CONGRATULATIONS

2025 Queer Youth Leaders

I am continually inspired by the resilience, ingenuity, and courage of queer youth leaders and their allies, who continue to show love for our community even in challenging times.

At HSA, our commitment remains steadfast: to serve as a safety net for all, regardless of background, beliefs, or personal circumstances. We will continue to champion health equity, foster welcoming spaces for our 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and defend access to essential services—including reproductive care, gender-affirming treatment, and behavioral health support. Together, we'll keep building a healthier, more inclusive future for everyone.

Read the full statement: me-qr.com/L/HSASolidarityStatement

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Santa Cruz County Mobile Crisis Response Team
24/7 In-person crisis support services for all Santa Cruz County.

1-800-952-2335 santacruzhealth.org/CrisisResponse

Scan the QR code to find key Santa Cruz County Statements and local resources for our immigrant and 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

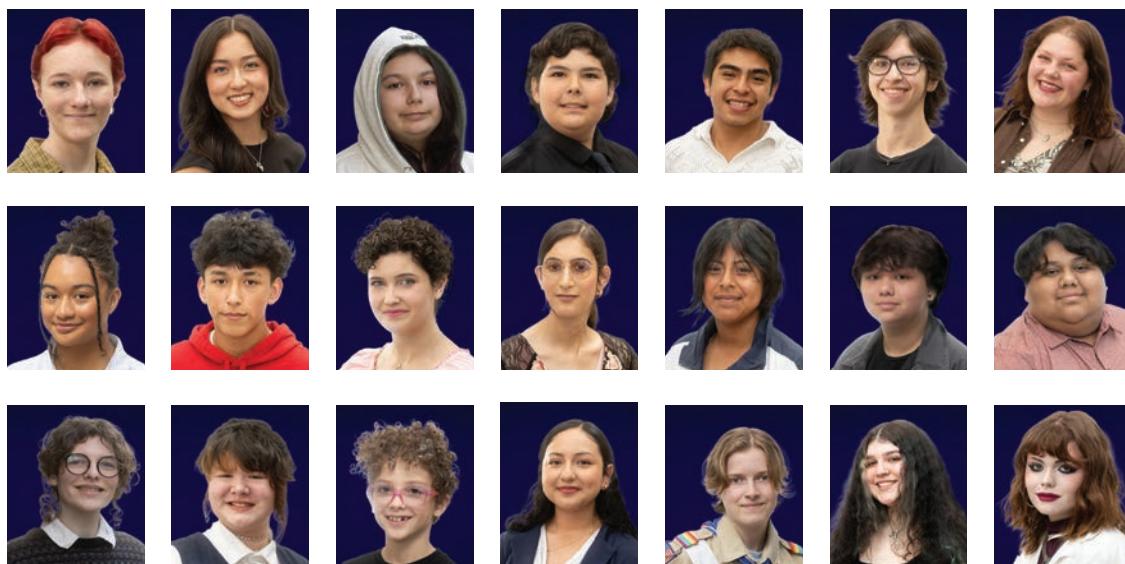


santacruzcountyca.gov/sanctuary

[@CountyofSantaCruz](https://twitter.com/CountyofSantaCruz)

Celebrating 28 years...

of Queer Youth Leadership Award nominees and their allies, past and present!



Since 1997, the Diversity Partnership Fund at the Community Foundation has invested over \$1.7 million in local causes that promote inclusiveness and social justice to better the lives of LGBTQ+ people in our community, now and for future generations.

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

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QUEER YOUTH LEADERSHIP AWARD

Recognizing the leadership of nine LGBTQIA2S+ youth for their incredible accomplishments and contributions to their schools and greater communities.

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ALLY TO QUEER YOUTH AWARD

Acknowledging the leadership of thirteen allies for making significant contributions to improving the lives of LGBTQIA2S+ youth and their families.

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ORGANIZATIONAL ALLY TO QUEER YOUTH AWARD

Recognizing six organizational allies that have made significant contributions to improving the lives of LGBTQ2S+ youth and the Santa Cruz County community.

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JUDGING FACILITATORS & JUDGES

A big thank you to our prestigious judging facilitators and judges for taking the time and careful consideration to award four queer youth leaders, one ally, and one organizational ally.

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FINAL RECOGNITIONS & RESOURCES

- Community of Care
- Grants, Scholarships & Honorariums to LGBTQ+ Clubs
- Student Rights, Advocacy & Community Resources
- Recognizing our Volunteers & Core Production Team
- Recognizing our Co-sponsors & Supporters
- Mental Health Resources

PRONOUNS GUIDE

Gender affirmative pronouns are the set of pronouns that a person identifies with and would like to be called when their proper name is not being used. Some individuals may use more than one set of pronouns, and pronouns may change over time. With the inclusion of new pronouns or neopronouns, there are many pronouns in addition to the familiar she, he and they.

A person's pronouns are not "preferred", as this implies it is not necessary to use their designated pronouns. Not using the requested pronoun, or misgendering, is disrespectful, and can cause emotional harm. Similarly, one should never tell another person that their pronouns are "incorrect." Using the correct pronoun for someone affirms that you see them as the same gender that they see themselves, and that you respect their identity. Research shows that using a person's accurate pronouns is one of the most powerful ways to support a person and promote their wellbeing.

If you make a mistake, don't panic! Apologize, correct yourself, and continue the conversation. Try not to dwell on it or over apologize as this may bring more unwanted attention to the mistake. It may be considerate to apologize privately later. It helps to slow down so as to be able to use the correct pronoun. If you are unsure about how to use someone's pronoun, it is always better to ask than to make an assumption.

Here are some suggestions for ways to share and ask about someone's pronouns:

- Offer your name and pronouns in your introduction before asking for theirs: "What pronouns do you use?"
- Add your pronoun to name tags or badges; wear a pronoun button
- Include your pronouns with your signature on emails, and your name on virtual platforms, like Zoom

We celebrate that the singular pronoun "they" is officially grammatically correct. The *Washington Post*'s style guide ratified the usage of "they" in 2015. Post copy editor Bill Walsh explained that the singular they is "the only sensible solution to English's lack of a gender-neutral third person singular personal pronoun." In 2019, "they" was designated Word of the Year by Merriam-Webster, "marking the rise of the use of the venerable plural pronoun to refer to a single person whose gender is non-binary." (*New York Times*, Dec 10, 2019).

While "he" has been considered a masculine pronoun and "she" a feminine pronoun, both pronouns can be used by all genders. They are not restricted in any way to the gender binary, and many non-binary individuals will use one or both, often in addition to "they". Some people do not use pronouns, and just use their first or last name, or a part of their name, in place of a pronoun.

An explosion of new pronouns or neopronouns are being created as individuals develop language to describe their authentic identity and/or gender experience. Some examples of common neopronouns are: **ae/aer, ey/em, shi/hir, hi/hem, vey/ver, fae/faer, kye/kyr, ze/zir, xe/xem**.

PRONOUN CONJUGATION CHART

from The University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee's LGBTQ+ Resource Center

Note: the first column is meant to indicate two separate – but similarly spelled – sets of pronouns. They are ae/aer/aers and fae/faer/faers.

(f)ae	e/ey	he	per	she	they	ve	xe	ze/zie
(f)aer	em	him	per	her	them	ver	xem	hir
(f)aer	eir	his	pers	her	their	vis	xyr	hir
(f)aers	eirs	his	pers	hers	theirs	vis	xyrs	hirs
(f)aerself	eirself	himself	perself	herself	themself	verself	xemself	hirself

If you would like more information on pronouns, the University of Wisconsin's website uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns is excellent, and pronouns.org is another helpful reference. For additional practice, go to practicewithpronouns.com or minus18.org.au/pronouns



AWARDS CEREMONY PROGRAM

OPENING

Celebration of Queer Youth Nominees



MÓNICA MORALES

Director of the Health Services Agency, County of Santa Cruz



QYLA 2025 THEME

Soquel High School Queer Straight Alliance (QSA)



HONORING QUEER YOUTH LEADERSHIP AWARD

Nominees

QUEER YOUTH LEADERSHIP AWARD

Awardee Enalayah Rivera Neese



QUEER YOUTH LEADERSHIP AWARD

Awardee Alex Trask



HONORING ALLY TO QUEER YOUTH AWARD

Nominees



ALLY TO QUEER YOUTH AWARD

Awardee Deyanira Matsuo-Albor



TRIBUTE TO LGBTQIA2S+ TRAILBLAZER

Kaleo Kaluhiwa



QUEER YOUTH LEADERSHIP AWARD

Awardee Izabella Leon



IN MEMORIAM

HONORING ORGANIZATIONAL ALLY TO QUEER YOUTH

Nominees



ORGANIZATIONAL ALLY TO QUEER YOUTH

Awardee Raíces y Cariño Family Center (RC Fam)



QUEER YOUTH LEADERSHIP AWARD

Awardee Carlos Joel González

FINALE



QUEER YOUTH TASK FORCE MESSAGE



WHAT IS THE QYTF?

Comprised of individuals and organizations, the Queer Youth Task Force of Santa Cruz County (QYTF) has worked with and supported LGBTQIAS+ youth for 28 years. Our goal is to improve the quality of life for all LGBTQIAS+ youth and families in our community.

-  P. O. Box 3143
Santa Cruz, CA 95063
-  (831) 427-4004
-  QYTF.org
-  info@QYTF.org

28TH ANNUAL QUEER YOUTH LEADERSHIP AWARDS

May 10, 2025

WELCOME!

Thank you for attending the 28th Annual Queer Youth Leadership Awards. Tonight the Santa Cruz County community comes together to celebrate and recognize some of today's young Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and Two-Spirit (LGBTQIA2S+) leaders and their individual and organizational allies. The Queer Youth Task Force of Santa Cruz County (QYTF) is proud to welcome you to this year's awards ceremony. Please join us in recognizing all the nominees for the following award categories: the Queer Youth Leadership Award, the Ally to Queer Youth Award, and the Organizational Ally to Queer Youth Award.

QYLA has been many things to many people. QYLA is about gathering as a community, bearing witness, visibility, celebration, raucous applause, and, above all, an outpouring of love. We thank our trailblazers for helping us get as far as we are today, and as we look to the future, we know there is still so much more to be done. We will work to continue inspiring youth leaders, allies, and organizations to create positive change for the LGBTQIA2S+ community for the next 28 years and beyond.

Thank you to the many volunteers and sponsors of QYLA!

Core Production Team of the 2025 Queer Youth Leadership Awards



BIENVENIDOS!

Gracias por asistir a la 28^a edición de los Premios Anuales de Liderazgo Juvenil Queer. Esta noche, la comunidad del condado de Santa Cruz se reúne para celebrar y reconocer a algunos de los líderes jóvenes lesbianas, gays, bisexuales, queer, en duda, intersexuales, asexuales y de dos espíritus (LGBTQIA2E+) y sus aliados individuales y organizacionales. El Grupo de Trabajo de Jóvenes Queer del Condado de Santa Cruz (QYTF) se enorgullece en darle la bienvenida a la ceremonia de premiación de este año. Únase a nosotros al reconocer a todos los nominados para las siguientes categorías de premios: el Premio al Liderazgo de la Juventud Queer, el Premio Aliado a la Juventud Queer y el Premio Aliado Organizacional a la Juventud Queer.

QYLA ha sido muchas cosas para muchas personas. QYLA se trata de reunirnos en comunidad, dar testimonio, visibilidad, celebración, estruendosos aplausos y, sobre todo, una efusión de amor. Agradecemos a nuestros pioneros por ayudarnos a llegar tan lejos como estamos hoy y, al mirar hacia el futuro, sabemos que aún queda mucho por hacer. Trabajaremos para continuar inspirando a líderes juveniles, aliados y organizaciones para crear un cambio positivo para la comunidad LGBTQIA2E+ durante los próximos 28 años y más.

¡Gracias a los muchos voluntarios y patrocinadores de QYLA!

Equipo de Producción Central de los Premios al Liderazgo Juvenil Queer 2025

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY MESSAGE



County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

Agency Administration

1080 Emeline Avenue, Santa Cruz, CA 95060

(831) 454-7519 Fax: (831) 454-4770

santacruzhealth.org

Mónica Morales, Health Services Agency Director

May 10, 2025

Mónica Morales
HSA Director

Dr. Lisa Hernandez
Health Officer

Jen Herrera
Assistant Director

Jessica Randolph
Administrative Services
Director

Karen Kern
Behavioral Health
Director

Andrew Strader
Environmental Health
Director

Amy Peeler
Health Centers Director

Pam Conelly
Public Health Director

Dear friends and community members,

Welcome to the 28th Annual Queer Youth Leadership Awards! I am honored to be in community celebrating our queer youth leaders tonight. We are deeply grateful for their service and contribution to our community.

As a past Queer Youth Leadership Award recipient, I know firsthand how important it is as a young person to feel connected and supported – to have friends and a community that honors you and understands the unique contributions that you bring to our community. The values of equity, inclusion, and integrity that I retained as a young leader, I instill in all my work today. It is an honor to stand before today's youth leaders –because the leaders we are honoring did not wait their turn. They owned the moment – now. Leadership is not about titles; it is not about having the loudest voice or the biggest resume. Leadership is about vision. It is about courage and most importantly, it is about action. These are the qualities we honor in this year's awardees.

In the current climate where fear and discrimination are ever present and LGBTQIA+ rights are being disrupted, we must continue to take pause and remember that our community has deep histories of resistance, resilience, and celebration. This resistance and resilience is exemplified by the stories we celebrate today. Our youth honorees face many challenges, but growth is not a straight line – it is built through tenacity, courage, and determination.

I invite you tonight to hold the 2025 QYLA celebrations as resistance. We resist through joy, festivities, and being together; by voicing our truths and moving to **action**, not just tonight but in the future to come. I invite you to learn from today's youth and follow their lead. Lead not to impress, but to impact and transform community. Today, we celebrate the great leadership of queer youth in Santa Cruz County. In times like these when we are hungry for hope, vision, and courage – they are exactly who we have been waiting for.

In gratitude & solidarity,

Mónica Morales (she/her/ella)

Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency Director

SANTA CRUZ CITY SCHOOLS WELCOME MESSAGES



WELCOME FROM SUPERINTENDENT KRIS MUNRO, SANTA CRUZ CITY SCHOOLS (SCCS)

I am delighted Santa Cruz City Schools is hosting this year's Queer Youth Leadership Awards. It is both our pride and responsibility as a public school district to ensure that our doors are open and welcoming to every student. In 2025, I believe it is important not only that that work continues undaunted, but that it is visible to everyone in the community.

In Santa Cruz City Schools, it is our commitment to foster a district culture that promotes inclusion, empowers student leadership, and creates schools that are not only safe and welcoming spaces, but spaces where LGBTQIA+ students, families and staff thrive. SCCS has a longstanding history of supporting the LGBTQIA+ community, exemplified by our District LGBTQIA+ Task Force and student-led LGBTQIA+ clubs, which have been active for over two decades. We encourage our families to learn more or get involved by visiting sccs.net/lgbtq

While we have made significant progress, we acknowledge that this is a journey spanning generations. I am incredibly grateful to QYLA and the Safe Schools Project for recognizing the vital contributions of students, staff, and allies dedicated to improving the lives of LGBTQ+ youth in our community.

On behalf of the SCCS Board and our entire learning community, I am excited to welcome you to Soquel High School to celebrate the impactful leadership of our students, staff, and community.



WELCOME FROM SUPERINTENDENT KRIS MUNRO, SANTA CRUZ CITY SCHOOLS (SCCS)

A school is a special place. High School is not only a place to study—to explore the past, present and future of the world around us—but a place for students to explore their community and themselves as they grow up together. Because of this, it must be home for everyone: regardless of what their home looks like; regardless of what their family looks like; regardless of the language they speak, their place of worship, their gender, their gender expression, or their preference in prom date.

I am so proud that Soquel High is hosting the Queer Youth Leadership Awards. What a wonderful moment for our young queer leaders, what a privilege to celebrate their strides and their impact, and what a perfect time in our society's story to stand up as a community beside our LGBTQ students, staff and friends.

It is so important to recognize our Queer Youth Leaders and allies, and to celebrate each stride that makes it easier for every student to call our schools "home". It is thanks to these young leaders, to our school community, to The Safe Schools Project & QYLA and so many others that we can look into the future and see the necessary progress toward equality is marching forward in Santa Cruz County.

Thank you for being part of that celebration today.

PAR AVION
Per via aerea



MESSAGE FROM LGBTQIA2S+ TRAILBLAZER, KALEO KALUHIWA



DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS (AND OLDER ONES TOO):

At this time, we're facing challenges I never could have imagined in my teens. Your generation faces climate anxiety, political polarization, and renewed attacks on immigrants and your fundamental right to exist authentically. As someone who witnessed friends become ill and die during the AIDS crisis, when, as now, silence=death, I recognize the weight you carry.

Yet I've learned that resilience isn't about weathering storms unchanged—it's about transforming with them, deepening into your essential being. Your generation's fluidity in identity and expression represents evolution, not confusion. Where we fought for tolerance, you rightfully demand inclusion and integration. This is progress!!

Growing up disconnected from my authentic self led me down a painful path. I built a facade—a performative personality that left me hollow. I struggled to meet expectations that were never mine. My healing began only when I both turned inward, forging genuine connections with myself, while also going outward, finding solace and wisdom in nature, and building honest relationships with friends who saw me and accepted me completely.

Likewise, when my generation faced an epidemic that ravaged our community while much of society looked away, we discovered our greatest strength—each other. We created a family where there was none, built support systems from scratch, and transformed grief into action.

What sustained us through that dark period? Community. Friendship. Family. Fierce joy. Unapologetic fabulousness. Tending to our grieving hearts. Dancing. Playing. Singing. Creating art. Making Love. When the world determined our lives disposable, we insisted on celebrating life itself, activism included.

Here's what I've learned: In times of uncertainty and turmoil, find your people, find yourself. When policies aim to isolate you, build bridges instead. Transform anger into creative resistance. Practice radical self-care. Go inside to connect with your truth.

The road ahead has all kinds of turns, but you stand on foundations built by those who fought when existence itself was criminalized. Your struggle is uniquely yours, yet connected to a magnificent lineage of resilience.

No one on their deathbed ever said, "I wish I would have posted more on Instagram".

The AIDS crisis taught me to ask: What is a life worth living and protecting? Who and what most needs our help? What are your unique gifts and passions, and how can you contribute them to creating a better world?

*Aloha nui loa,
Kaleo Kaluhiwa*

SOQUEL HIGH SCHOOL QSA WELCOME MESSAGE

Welcome to the annual Queer Youth Leadership Awards (QYLA) awards. Here at Soquel High we have our own Queer Straight Alliance (QSA) club! We provide a safe space for our fellow queer and straight ally classmates to find community within their school. Thanks to the help of our teacher supervisor Carina Wandel we are able to have an adult that we can find comfort in knowing she's in our corner. We recognize that this is a very difficult time for the queer community, and that is why this event is more important than ever. Our theme of reach for the sky symbolizes the strength and courage to rise above the hate that we face. Community is now vital and our QSA club at Soquel is one of a kind. QYLA is here to celebrate all the amazing minds and hearts of the youth in our area that are making this world a better place. Thank you so much for coming to celebrate all the wonderful people nominated for QYLA, and enjoy the night!

QYLA 2025 THEME

This year's Queer Youth Leadership Awards ceremony, hosted at Soquel High School, will be a celebration of LGBTQIA2S+ individuals who show their dedication and aspiration to better futures for their community—those who reach for the skies.

Just as birds soar high despite the pull of gravity, the queer community continually reaches for freedom in the face of hatred and repression. The open sky represents our hope and the wish to one day surpass the obstacles that keep us down and claim our freedom.

The QYLA ceremony will honor local community members and organizations who show outstanding dedication when working to reach that day. Every attendee will be greeted with aspects of the stars and wings, symbolizing the endless possibilities they each hold with the unique wings to take them there.

*Reaching
for the
Sky*



AWARDS CEREMONY EMCEES



IZABELLA LEON

she/her/hers & they/them/their

Student, Pajaro Valley High School (PVHS)

Izabella Leon is a senior at Pajaro Valley High School. She is involved in multiple activities on campus, including SAGA, BSU, ASB, flag football, and more. After graduation, they plan on attending Sacramento State and majoring in Public Relations and Sociology. Their goal is to be a Public Relations manager for women's sports teams in the Bay Area.



MADELINE ALIAH

she/her/hers

Student, Cypress High School

Madeline Aliah is a student activist and writer attending Cypress High School. She is active with the QTYC and Youth-Led Leadership Alliance. For her 18th birthday, she published her first book, *This is My Body: Poems by a Teen Trans Fem*, and spoke at TEDx Santa Cruz about moving "Beyond the Safe Space." She has spoken at a pride flag raising at Cabrillo's Watsonville Center and as a panelist for United Against Hate Week. A member of the Santa Cruz Youth Poet Laureate Council, she regularly presents her poetry at the MAH with the Santa Cruz Writers of Color Collective.

IN THESE DIFFICULT TIMES, REMEMBER...

YOU ARE
BRAVER than you BELIEVE
STRONGER than you SEEM
& SMARTER than you KNOW

— CHRISTOPHER ROBIN

SCTRANS.ORG

ABOUT QUEER YOUTH LEADERSHIP AWARDS

OUR MISSION

The mission of QYLA is to improve the lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and Two-Spirit (LGBTQIA2S+) youth by increasing the positive awareness of Queer Youth Leadership, and increasing safe and welcoming environments in the home, school, and community. QYLA honors today's queer youth leaders and their allies in three award categories: the Queer Youth Leadership Award; the Ally to Queer Youth Award; and the Organizational Ally to Queer Youth Award.



Creating Change Through Celebration





CELEBRATING QUEER YOUTH & ALLIES SINCE 1998

In April of 1998, Santa Cruz County enjoyed the first Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Youth Award Ceremony and Banquet at Hobee's restaurant, recognizing queer youth across the county for being leaders within their communities. The event was primarily produced by the grass-roots leadership of a core team of volunteers solicited from the local GLBT Youth Task Force and the wider community. The Youth Awards idea was born out of the Task Force's subcommittee to raise the visibility of queer youth in our county. This annual gala event has been hosted in communities across the county and brings many intersecting identities together in celebration of queer youth, their allies, and all of their achievements.

- **1998**
Hobee's Restaurant, Santa Cruz
- **1999**
YWCA Watsonville, Watsonville
- **2000**
Coconut Grove, Santa Cruz
- **2001**
Coconut Grove, Santa Cruz
- **2002**
Louden Nelson Community Center, Santa Cruz
- **2003**
Henry J. Mello Center, Watsonville
- **2004**
Harbor High School, Santa Cruz
- **2005**
Santa Cruz High School, Santa Cruz
- **2006**
Henry J. Mello Center, Watsonville
- **2007**
Harbor High School, Santa Cruz
- **2008**
New Brighton Middle School, Santa Cruz
- **2009**
Scotts Valley High School, Scotts Valley
- **2010**
New Brighton Middle School, Santa Cruz
- **2011**
San Lorenzo Valley High School, Felton
- **2012**
Shoreline Middle School, Santa Cruz
- **2013**
Pajaro Valley High School, Watsonville
- **2014**
New Brighton Middle School, Santa Cruz
- **2015**
San Lorenzo Valley High School, Felton
- **2016**
Aptos High School, Aptos
- **2017**
Pajaro Valley High School, Watsonville
- **2018**
Soquel High School, Soquel
- **2019**
San Lorenzo Valley High School, Felton
- **2020**
Live Stream
- **2021**
Live Stream
- **2022**
Watsonville High School, Watsonville
- **2023**
New Brighton Middle School, Capitola
- **2024**
Scotts Valley High School, Scotts Valley
- **2025**
Soquel High School, Soquel

QYLA LEGACY PROJECT

OUR MISSION

The intention of the QYLA Legacy Project is to document a unique organization that has continued for 28 years—an organization that honors, inspires and provides a platform for queer youth and their allies. We hope to include former awardees and nominees in the project, highlighting their experience with the QYLAs and where they are now. We also hope that this project can be used to educate the general public about the resiliency, heart, and activism of the queer youth of Santa Cruz County and their allies.



BE A PART OF IT!

So much has changed since 1998, but there is still so much work to be done. The Project will honor the progress QYLA awardees and nominees have made, while at the same time bringing attention to what's next.

QYLA has preserved all of the original bios and video footage previous awards, including news articles, video interviews with awardees and nominees, photographs and QYLA programs — documenting the over 700 nominees in the history of QYLA.

If you would like to be part of the QYLA Legacy Project, please contact us!

-  QYLA.org/legacy
-  legacy@QYLA.org
-  (831) 427-4004
-  Facebook.com/QYLALegacyProject

UNSUNG HEROES

As we celebrate and recognize tonight's young LGBTQIA2S+ leaders, we must pause to recognize that they are only a fraction of the LGBTQIA2S+ youth within Santa Cruz County. Due to fear, intolerance, and bullying, many LGBTQIA2S+ youth are closeted and invisible to the LGBTQIA2S+ community.

These "unsung heroes" are working to end homophobia and transphobia, and they are struggling daily to live a life free from bullying. Although they are not able to be here tonight, we must acknowledge their presence within our community and we must learn from their stories and the stories of today's awardees and nominees that there is more work to do.

On behalf of the Queer Youth Leadership Awards, we wish to recognize all of the unsung heroes across Santa Cruz County who, despite all obstacles, are continuing to live true to themselves.



FROM ALL THE PROUD
PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

Congratulations

QYLA 2026

Volunteer! Be part of the team!



Help plan the 2026 awards

QYLA.org

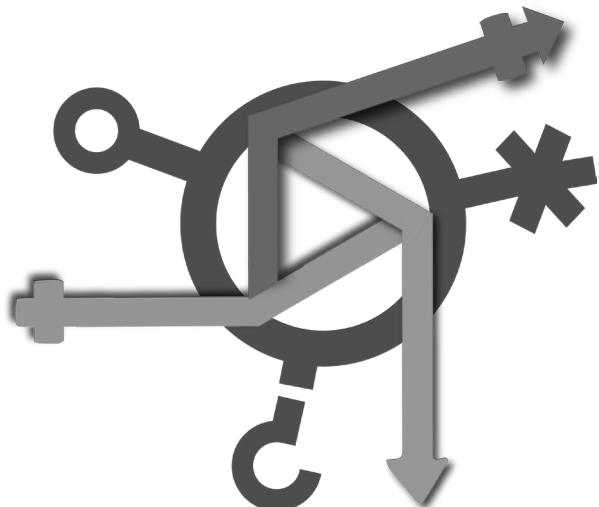
Congratulations to all the QYLA
Nominees & Awardees — and
their families & friends

***Thank you for your work and
vision to community***

QYTF

QUEER YOUTH TASK FORCE
OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

QYTF.org / (831) 427-4004 / info@QYTF.org



**Trans Teen Project
of Santa Cruz County**

Resources

TransMentoring Program partnership
with Big Brothers Big Sisters

Visibility Campaign

TransTeenProject.org

CONGRATULATIONS

2025 QYLA NOMINEES & AWARDEES!

The Santa Cruz County Office of Education is committed to supporting safe and inclusive schools for all LGBTQ+ students, staff and families.

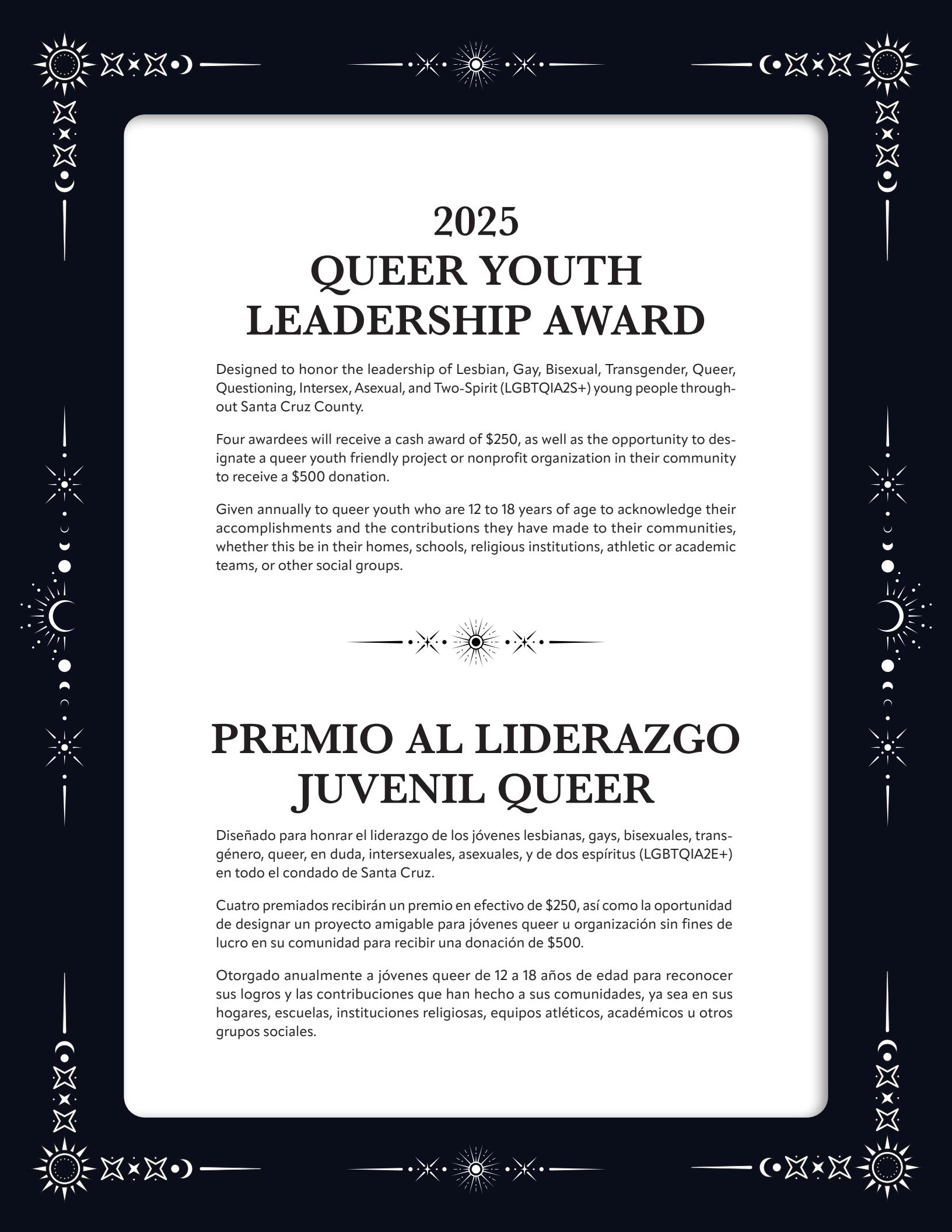
Ongoing support includes convening an LGBTQ+ task force with representatives from districts and schools across the county, developing and sharing resources, hosting events such as the annual Rainbow Flag Raising, and providing platforms and support to LGBTQ+ student leaders.



Scan the QR code to learn more about how LGBTQ+ high school students and allies can make their voices heard by joining the Queer Student Union!



sccoe.link/lgbtq



2025 QUEER YOUTH LEADERSHIP AWARD

Designed to honor the leadership of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and Two-Spirit (LGBTQIA2S+) young people throughout Santa Cruz County.

Four awardees will receive a cash award of \$250, as well as the opportunity to designate a queer youth friendly project or nonprofit organization in their community to receive a \$500 donation.

Given annually to queer youth who are 12 to 18 years of age to acknowledge their accomplishments and the contributions they have made to their communities, whether this be in their homes, schools, religious institutions, athletic or academic teams, or other social groups.

PREMIO AL LIDERAZGO JUVENIL QUEER

Diseñado para honrar el liderazgo de los jóvenes lesbianas, gays, bisexuales, transgénero, queer, en duda, intersexuales, asexuales, y de dos espíritus (LGBTQIA2E+) en todo el condado de Santa Cruz.

Cuatro premiados recibirán un premio en efectivo de \$250, así como la oportunidad de designar un proyecto amigable para jóvenes queer u organización sin fines de lucro en su comunidad para recibir una donación de \$500.

Otorgado anualmente a jóvenes queer de 12 a 18 años de edad para reconocer sus logros y las contribuciones que han hecho a sus comunidades, ya sea en sus hogares, escuelas, instituciones religiosas, equipos atléticos, académicos u otros grupos sociales.

**ALEX TRASK | AWARDEE***he/him/his & they/them/theirs*

Student, Delta Charter High School at Cabrillo College | Member, Queer Student Union (QSU) | Member, Queer Straight Alliance (QSA) Club | Resource Fair Coordinator, Queer, Trans & Allied Summit

Despite facing discrimination, Alex has transformed their adversity into a catalyst for change, taking on leadership roles, demonstrating incredible selflessness and kindness, and making Delta High School more inclusive. As a QSU member, Alex is currently managing a survey to assess school climate and gender-neutral restroom accessibility and will be presenting their data at the LGBTQ+ Symposium. Alex is also a dedicated QSA member, writing pen pal letters to his New Brighton Middle School "little buddy," and taking the initiative to create kid-friendly versions of the laws and ed codes that support LGBTQ+ youth. In 2024, they were the Resource Fair Coordinator at the Queer, Trans, and Allied Summit where they worked with community partners to ensure local youth had access to organizational resources like safe sex tools and mental health support. Even while taking additional classes to graduate early, Alex still made time to meet with policymakers at Sacramento's Advocacy Day, be an LGBTQ+ panelist at Santa Cruz Library's banned books discussion, participate in Camp Out, and volunteer to inventory the school's library books.

**CARLOS JOEL GONZÁLEZ | AWARDEE***he/him/his*

Student, Watsonville High School | Co-President, Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) Club | Leader, PRISM Student Coalition for Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

Carlos got involved in LGBTQ+ activism as early as 6th grade when he joined Lakeview Middle School's QSA club and later earned his position as QSA President. Now a junior at Watsonville High School, Carlos is the Co-president of the GSA club as well as a PRISM leader, mentoring middle and high school students in the Watsonville community. By sharing his experiences as an openly bisexual Latino youth, Carlos has helped build a more inclusive and open-minded community. Carlos is also a very talented performer, well known in the local musical theater community. He has not only performed in Watsonville High School's musical theater productions, but has also been featured in Cabrillo's productions of *In the Heights*, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, *Spongebob: The Musical*, and now, the All About Theater production of *Hadestown*. Carlos is also no stranger to the Queer Youth Leadership Awards, volunteering to perform a beautiful rendition of Frank Sinatra's "My Way" in last year's event.

**ENALAYAH RIVERA NEESE | AWARDEE***she/her/hers & they/them/theirs*

Student, Delta Charter High School at Cabrillo College | Leader, Queer Straight Alliance (QSA) Club

Enalayah is a strong, resilient woman of color who fights for justice for herself and her community. In their leadership class, Enalayah initiated a project to collect and distribute resources to Santa Cruz's unhoused population. Their efforts included presenting at the Sunrise Rotary to request financial support, organizing a bake sale and an online donation system, establishing a clothing and food drive, coordinating with Food Not Bombs to distribute the supplies to unhoused people downtown, and collecting requests for the next distribution. As a leader in Delta High's QSA Club, Enalayah helps make agendas and leads group discussions, ensuring everyone feels safe, supported, and heard. Motivated by recent threats to LGBTQ+ and undocumented youth, Enalayah pushed for the principal and board to keep student information private and establish protective protocols should ICE come to campus. Enalayah also writes and performs poetry, welcomes prospective students to the school, and has taken on additional projects like writing a coming-of-age memoir and researching the effects of drugs on teen mental health.



IZABELLA LEON | AWARDEE

she/her/hers & they/them/theirs

Student, Pajaro Valley High School (PVHS) | President, Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) Club | Commissioner of Multicultural Events, Associated Student Body (ASB) | Co-chair & Youth Commissioner, City of Watsonville Teen Action Council (TAC) | Member, Youth Action Network | Member, Parks & Recreation Commission

As the President of PVHS' GSA Club and ASB Commissioner of Multicultural Events, Izabella facilitates activities and events like the Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day and PVUSD's first joint National Coming Out Day. Izabella is also involved in Ethnic Literature Studies and Student Action Council where they revised the PV student handbook to better define hate motivated speech, and helped English Learner students with their CARE presentations about issues like the history of slurs and maladaptive coping strategies. With the Youth Action Network, Izzy connected, and provided resources to youth-serving organizations and urged the City of Watsonville to adopt a universal standard for youth behavioral health: the 41 Developmental Assets Framework for Youth. As the Co-chair and Youth Commissioner for Teen Action Council, and as a member of Watsonville's Parks and Recreation Commission, Izabella is bridging the gap between local government and youth, fiercely advocating for systemic change with more youth representation on boards like CASA and Santa Cruz's Youth Council, more substance abuse and mental health resources, and more funding for afterschool programs.



ALICE SOLDATE | NOMINEE

she/her/hers

Student, Harbor High School | Leader, Queer Straight Alliance (QSA) Club | Member, Santa Cruz Queer History Podcast

As a leader and designated "Cookie Fairy" at Harbor High's QSA, Alice is a cornerstone of the club, bringing sweet treats to the club's meetings and events, and providing a welcoming and enjoyable space for LGBTQ+ students. During meetings, Alice is outspoken and unafraid to share her perspective on subjects she's passionate about, leading the way and setting an example for other students to have open, honest conversations about LGBTQ+ issues. Alice also provided technical support and helped research and write interview questions for the Santa Cruz County Queer History podcast, a platform for the older LGBTQ+ generation to share their experiences and offer advice. Whether she's meeting with QSA, training with the swim team, or discussing books with the school's literary reader's club, Alice's upbeat energy, self-assurance, and infectious joy permeate everything she does. She doesn't mince words when sharing her point of view and is always ready and willing to stand up for what is right.



EVAN JACQUES-MAYNES | NOMINEE

he/him/his & they/them/theirs

Student, Aptos High School | Leader, Rainbow Alliance Club | Leader, PRISM Student Coalition for Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

As a leader in Aptos High School's Rainbow Alliance Club, Evan is passionately vocal about social justice and the importance of supporting LGBTQ+ youth. Over the years, Evan has spoken at many Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD) school board meetings as a Student Senator, advocating for the importance of ethnic studies and the need for more gender-neutral bathrooms. Evan also attended and spoke publicly at an impactful and moving PVUSD community meeting in 2024, courageously sharing their experiences as a trans student and expressing the difficulties they and their friends have faced trying to access all gender restrooms. Starting out as a member of Watsonville's GSA club, PRISM, Evan quickly established themselves as a leader in the group, sharing their artistic skills and inspiring other members to take pride in their identities. Evan is also a talented performer and visual artist, acting in their school's theater programs, providing free art workshops for students, and making and donating ceramic bowls to a Second Harvest Food Bank organization called Empty Bowls.

**HEX BAILEY | NOMINEE***all pronouns*

Student, Harbor High School | Creative Director, Queer Student Alliance (QSA) Club | Member, Santa Cruz Queer History Podcast

Hex is a student at Harbor High School who has also been an active participant in the Santa Cruz Queer History podcast. Working in collaboration with other queer youth in the county, Hex helped interview local Santa Cruz elders about their unique experiences related to queer history. They not only came up with interview questions and helped others formulate questions, but were also one of the primary students who conducted the interviews. As a calm, confident, and familiar interviewer, Hex was easily able to put interviewees at ease, greatly contributing to the podcast's success and expanding their reach, not just within the queer community, but beyond as well. They have a spirit of volunteerism that really shines, being the first to raise their hand if the podcast needs artwork, or if someone needs to be interviewed at lunch. Hex is also very artistic and creative, acting as Harbor High's QSA Creative Director and taking the lead on all artistic projects for the club.

**MARK, ADEL MENDOZA LUENGAS | NOMINEE***he/him/his, she/her/hers & they/them/theirs*

Student, Pajaro Valley High School (PVHS) | Member, Student Action Council | Leader, PRISM Student Coalition for Gender, Sex, and Sexuality | Member, Youth Advisory Task Force

Mark's social justice activism began as a member, then the President of his middle school's QSA club where he led a school-wide National Coming Out Day and a Day of Silence. Now a member of the Student Action Council at PVHS, Adel continues to speak publicly, advocating for herself and other queer and trans students. For two consecutive years, Adel has spoken at the district-wide Harvey Milk Day event and acted as a student advocate at PVUSD's LGBTQ+ committee meeting regarding all-gender restrooms. Adel bravely shared their experience with gendered restrooms, explaining the daily fear and stress trans and gender diverse students face regarding bathroom safety and use. When Watsonville's PRISM club for LGBTQ+ youth and allies launched, Mark was a leader from the start, volunteering and acting as a role model for other members. Mark also contributes to their local community as a member of the Santa Cruz Youth Advisory Task Force and continues to stand up for LGBTQ+ rights, most notably, by proudly leading the Santa Cruz Pride parade with a non-binary flag.

**SADIE BELL | NOMINEE***they/them/theirs*

Student, San Lorenzo Valley High School | President, Trans Student Union | President, Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) Club | Co-president, Interact Club

For over three years Sadie has been an LGBTQ+ club leader, advocate, and role model, providing safe spaces for LGBTQ+ youth to build friendships, feel accepted, and succeed academically. As President of the GSA club as well as the Trans Student Union, they have created a welcoming community for LGBTQ+ youth to support each other. They have also initiated important conversations with students, staff, and district members unfamiliar with the issues facing the LGBTQ+ youth. Sadie's self-efficacy, resilience, and ability to empower is also apparent in their role as Co-president of San Lorenzo Valley High School's Interact club. After returning to in-person learning, the club suffered a significant decline in interest but Sadie's leadership and direction helped rebuild the team, allowing their first community-wide, charitable event to take place since Covid. Outside of school, Sadie collaborated with the Diversity Center to develop the Santa Cruz Queer Youth Prom for next year, and has taken on the roles of lighting designer and technical director in over a dozen productions for their theater program.

THANK YOU TO THE QYLAS, FOR REMEMBERING **MILO ANIMA**



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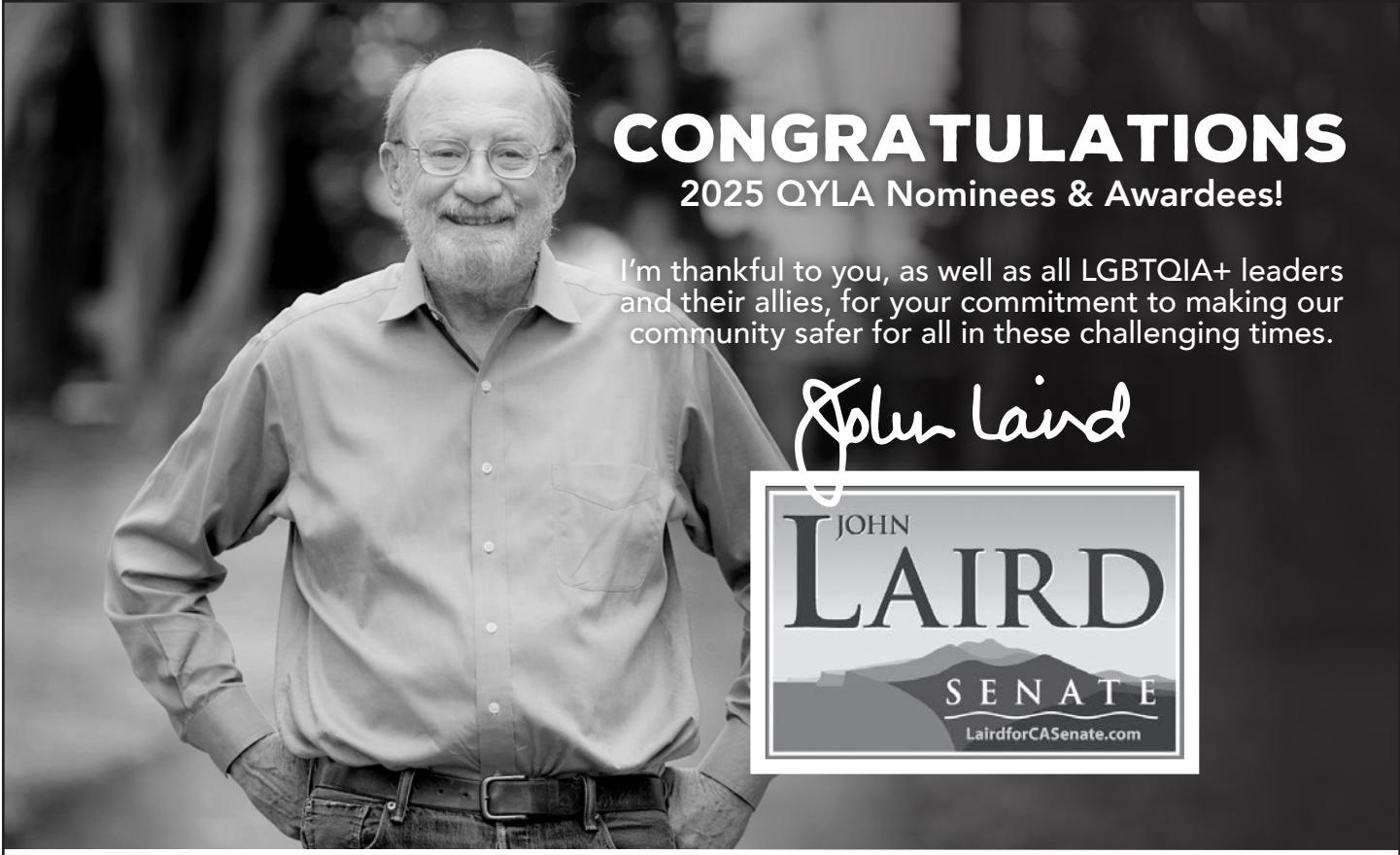
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PANETTA**
for CONGRESS

**Congratulations to all the
QYLA Nominees & Awardees!**

AUTHORIZED BY JIMMY PANETTA FOR CONGRESS | P.O. BOX 103, CARMEL VALLEY, CA 93924 | FEC# C00592154



CONGRATULATIONS
2025 QYLA Nominees & Awardees!

I'm thankful to you, as well as all LGBTQIA+ leaders and their allies, for your commitment to making our community safer for all in these challenging times.

John Laird



Paid for by John Laird for Senate 2024, FPPC ID: 1434540, 343 Soquel Avenue #426, Santa Cruz, CA 95062



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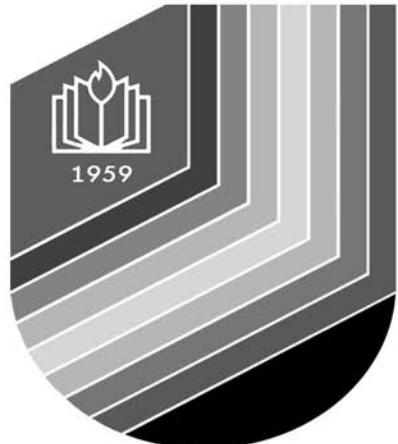
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2025 ALLY TO QUEER YOUTH AWARD

Designed to honor an ally of any age who has made significant contributions to improving the lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and Two-Spirit (LGBTQIA2S+) youth and youth who have LGBTQIA2S+ family members.

One non-monetary award is given.

These awards are for allies who actively work to create safe spaces for Queer Youth. Examples include, creating support groups, increasing visibility of Queer Youth, inviting Queer speakers, or countering Queer oppression by stopping anti-queer slurs.

PREMIO PARA ALIADO DE LA JUVENTUD QUEER

Diseñado para honrar a un aliado de cualquier edad que haya realizado contribuciones significativas para mejorar las vidas de jóvenes lesbianas, gays, bisexuales, transgénero, queer, en duda, intersexuales, asexuales, y de dos espíritus (LGBTQIA2E+) y jóvenes que tienen familiares LGBTQIA2E+.

Se otorga un premio no monetario.

Estos premios son para aliados que trabajan activamente para crear espacios seguros para la Juventud Queer. Los ejemplos incluyen, crear grupos de apoyo, aumentar la visibilidad de la juventud queer, invitar a oradores queer o contrarrestar la opresión queer al detener los insultos anti-queer.

**DEYANIRA MATSUO-ALBOR | AWARDEE***she/her/hers*

Lead Custodian, Lakeview Middle School

Deyanira Matsuo-Albor, known to students as Matsuo, is the lead custodian at Lakeview Middle School. In addition to being an invaluable member of the Lakeview team, she's also an active ally for the LGBTQ+ community, showing her support by attending Lakeview LGBTQ+ events and dedicating her time to help the QSA club. When students wanted to create a rainbow door for National Coming Out Day, Matsuo secured the door frame, ensuring they had the opportunity to express themselves while also being safe. Matsuo is a compassionate, approachable, and reliable ally who continuously shows her commitment to making Lakeview a supportive and inclusive place for the LGBTQ+ community in more ways than one. Every day, Matsuo invites students to help her raise the progress flag in recognition of diverse identities and the ongoing fight for LGBTQ+ acceptance and equality. Matsuo cares deeply for each individual on campus, standing up against hate and discrimination and serving as a safe and trusted confidant for LGBTQ+ students and staff.

**CYBELE LOLLEY, LMFT | NOMINEE***she/her/hers*

Clinical Program Director, The Diversity Center

As a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, Cybele has risen as a true leader in the advocacy of mental health and wellbeing services for LGBTQ+ youth. Cybele started The Diversity Center's Mental Health Clinic from scratch to ensure free & accessible LGBTQ+ Affirming counseling services for English and Spanish speaking youth and families through virtual and in-person sessions at schools, The Diversity Center, and Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance (PVPSA). Cybele is preparing the next generation of clinicians to better serve a diverse range of families and youth. She has also provided training on LGBTQ+ Affirming Mental Health Care and Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE) to clinical and administrative staff at youth-serving behavioral health organizations. In addition to her advocacy for gender-neutral bathrooms and her contributions as an affirming clinician, trainer, and advocate for SOGIE inclusive organizational practices, her efforts as The Diversity Center's Clinic Program Director rightfully earned her the PVPSA Heroes in Prevention Award for Youth and Young Adults in 2024.

**DESI SALINAS-HOLZ | NOMINEE***he/him/his*

Student, Watsonville High School | Co-president, Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) Club | Member, Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD) Student Advisory Council | Athletic Commissioner, Associated Student Body (ASB)

Growing up with openly queer parents, Desi has actively participated in pride parades and events his entire life. He became an ally and activist as early as 5th grade when he joined his schools' Gender and Sexuality (GSA) Club to support queer and trans youth through elementary and middle school. Now a Junior at Watsonville High School, Desi is the athletic commissioner for ASB and has taken on additional responsibilities as Co-president of his school's GSA Club. Desi is also a member of the PVUSD Student Advisory Council and, over the years, has spoken at many school board meetings advocating for more Ethnic Studies and LGBTQ+ youth rights. He has also been involved in the Watsonville Ivy League Project, varsity cross country and track, and school theater productions including the revival of a play about homophobic bullying called What's in a Name. No stranger to QYLA, Desi volunteered as last year's emcee and continues to advocate for equity and social justice as an LGBTQ+ ally.

**EM WHITWELL | NOMINEE***they/them/theirs*

Teacher, New Brighton Middle School (NBMS) | Coach, NBMS Soccer | Advisor, Queer Straight Alliance (QSA) Club

As a science teacher, soccer coach, mentor, and club leader at New Brighton Middle School, Mx. Whit, is an outstanding role model of queer visibility, affirmation, and inclusion. Their leadership has helped create a safe space for students and staff to be their genuine selves and feel supported while navigating challenging discussions and complex emotions. When faced with a parent's hateful social media post, Mx. Whit displayed vulnerability and courage, standing up against adult bullying and modeling unwavering support on behalf of LGBTQ+ students. As the NBMS QSA advisor, Mx. Whit has the incredible ability to create a space that allows for all voices and perspectives to be heard, fostering productive discourse and communal support. They have also supported students who wanted to attend LGBTQ+ events such as the Rainbow Conference. While waiting in line at the conference, Mx. Whit had students huddle up to discuss their goals for the conference, and when the huddle broke, the students' excitement and sheer joy was palpable.

**JEN SALINAS-HOLZ | NOMINEE***she/her/hers/ella*

Advisor, Lakeview Middle School Queer Student Alliance (QSA) Club | Master of Social Work (MSW) Intern, Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance (PVPSA)

As 2019's Ally to Queer Youth Awardee, Jen continues to support the queer community and raise awareness about the challenges queer youth face. Jen collaborates with TransFamilies of Santa Cruz County to present and facilitate the annual Understanding Gender Summit, part of the Rainbow Conference, which teaches parents, educators, and adult allies about gender diversity and how to better support gender-diverse youth. She was the founder and advisor of the first elementary school GSA club in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD), and has advised seven GSA clubs in Watsonville, including PRISM, a community GSA started in 2024 at the Raíces y Cariño family center. In 2023, Jen co-founded the Rainbow Defense Coalition of Santa Cruz County and the Pajaro Valley, an organization that provides volunteer safety brigades for community events involving LGBTQ+ youth and other marginalized groups. As an openly queer adult, Jen not only helps students feel affirmed and accepted at school, but also advocates for LGBTQ+ youth throughout the Watsonville community.

**JESSICA HASSANI | NOMINEE***she/her/hers*

School Counselor, Soquel Elementary School | Co-founder & Advisor, Rainbow Club

Jessica is a well-respected and trusted counselor at Soquel Elementary School who ensures queer youth have affirming mental health resources on campus and models LGBTQ+ allyship to all students. She has been instrumental in improving the school environment, taking action against bullying and harassment, initiating conversations with targeted youth and offenders, teaching students to be more accepting of others' backgrounds and identities, and showing students how to advocate for their peers. Whereas in the past there were reported instances of harassment, today, the school has had no reported instances of LGBTQ+ youth bullying. As the co-founder and advisor for Soquel Elementary's first Rainbow Club, Jessica has helped normalize, welcome, and celebrate LGBTQ+ parents, families, and students. During Rainbow Club meetings, she shares videos and reads books that feature LGBTQ+ people, talks about acceptance, and leads projects like the "ABCs of Acceptance" book. This book features a collection of student drawings and brainstormed words, feelings, and actions to remind us we all belong and deserve respect.

**MEGGIE PINA | NOMINEE***she/her/hers*

Director of Well-being Programs, The Diversity Center | Co-lead, Queer Student Union (QSU) | Co-lead, Monterey County Rainbow Connections Youth Empowerment Council

As the Director of Well-being Programs at The Diversity Center, Meggie is responsible for overseeing a team of volunteers and staff, facilitating support groups for Santa Cruz and Watsonville youth and creating events to improve LGBTQ+ community engagement, advocacy, and acceptance. Meggie not only facilitated CampOUT, Queer Youth Prom with Santa Cruz COE, Rainbow Kids Circle, and a county-wide GSA skate night, she's also collaborated with TransFamilies, Raíces y Cariño, the Museum of Art and History (MAH), and the SCCOE to organize group trips to events like California's LGBTQ+ Advocacy Day and MAH's Threads of Love AIDS quilt exhibition. Meggie is also helping build an educational foundation for schools and youth-serving organizations as the Co-leader of QSU and Monterey County's Rainbow Connections Youth Empowerment Council. Additionally, Meggie has re-built the Triangle Speakers program and the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) training, written curricula for GSA and QSA, and become a certified trainer for Welcoming Schools. Meggie is a Queer Chicana multidisciplinary artist, advocate, and community organizer.

**NANCY WILLARD, MPH | NOMINEE***she/her/hers & they/them/theirs*

Health Services Manager, Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency | Lead, Rainbow Glitter Kids Day | Lead, Soquel Elementary School Rainbow Club

As the former Director of the Teen Health Outreach Program, Nancy provided comprehensive, accurate, and inclusive sexual health education to all Santa Cruz County teens, and advocated for improved sex education resources for LGBTQ+ youth. Now Santa Cruz County's Health Services Manager, Nancy continues to stand up for LGBTQ+ health and rights and courageously dedicate their time to LGBTQ+ affirming clubs for younger children. As the Lead for the Rainbow Club at Soquel Elementary School, Nancy creates a safe place at school for LGBTQ+ elementary kids, and their allies. The past two years, Nancy has also been the lead organizer of Rainbow Glitter Kids, the elementary-level community at Watsonville High School's Rainbow Conference. A day full of food, stories, crafts, and games, Rainbow Glitter Kids provides a playful and creative environment for kids to make friends and explore their queer identities. This event also gives parents and guardians the opportunity to connect, share experiences, and exchange resources.

**RAYNA "RAY" TERRY | NOMINEE***she/her/hers & they/them/theirs*

Jr. Staff, Food What?!

Rayna is a New School graduate who has dedicated the last two years to a youth empowerment and food injustice program called Food What?!. As a spring intern, she and other crew members learned about organic farming, culinary arts, and healthy food access, stepping outside their comfort zones to grow, cook, eat, and distribute fresh food. Ray quickly earned their position as Junior Staff, leading games, farm work, and inviting other youth to unapologetically be themselves. By sharing their difficult experiences with mental health, and being open about their own learning and growth, Ray has helped create a supportive and safe space for all youth to feel empowered and confident in their identities. She has also educated youth and staff about pronouns by kindly correcting people if she is misgendered, demonstrating the importance of pronouns and showing that it's ok to ask others to respect your gender identity. As a natural leader, Rayna's allyship, humility, kind nature, and unwavering commitment to being themselves has encouraged others to do the same.



REX OLIVIERI | NOMINEE

he/him/his

Teacher, San Lorenzo Valley Middle School (SLVMS) | Advisor, Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) Club

Rex is a dedicated leader of SLVMS' GSA Club, providing LGBTQ+ students with unwavering support, mentorship, and advocacy. When there was an increase in harassment in response to the school's support of LGBTQ+ rights, Rex was a fierce advocate, ensuring LGBTQ+ students' voices were heard and using inclusionary practices to help close-minded students learn, grow, and become more compassionate. Rex also facilitates projects and events centered around students' voices and values. One such event is an ever-popular Trevor Project fundraiser in which Rex and the SLVMS Principal volunteer to be water balloon targets. The GSA's recent growth can be attributed to the empowering and inclusive environment Rex fosters. His GSA students say he readily wants to learn more about the LGBTQ+ community and is mindful of students' situations. Rex encourages GSA members to meet regularly with the Principal and Dean of Students to address school-wide improvements. Thanks to Rex's mentorship, students have confidently advocated for gender-neutral restrooms and an expansion of the library collection to better represent LGBTQ+ youth.



RICARDO YERENA | NOMINEE

he/him/his/él

Agro-Engineer | Farmer | Community Health Worker

As a father passionate about his community, Ricardo works with Raíces y Cariño to actively challenge LGBTQ+ misinformation and stigma within the Spanish-speaking community and create safe spaces for parents to learn, ask questions, and grow as allies. Through culturally mindful education, Ricardo leads support groups and parent sessions to help families move from uncertainty to acceptance, directly combating biases that harm LGBTQ+ youth. He is a fearless advocate who meets families where they are, guiding them toward understanding and equipping them with tools to support their LGBTQ+ children. He ensures queer identities are seen, understood, and embraced, collaborating with organizations like TransFamilies to build strong allyship networks and celebrate queer youth. Ricardo's work at events like the Pajaro Valley Unified School District's Parent Conference, and his leadership on the Spanish-speaking panel at The Diversity Center's Triangle Speakers, has empowered dozens of families to break cycles of discrimination, create affirming homes, and normalize conversations about LGBTQ+ youth in a way that fosters lasting change.



TOBIN W. KELLER | NOMINEE

he/him/his & they/them/theirs

Faculty, Cabrillo College Art Department | Co-Chair, Rainbow Council | Faculty Advisor, Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) Club | President, Cabrillo College Federation of Teachers (CCFT)

In addition to being an art faculty member and President of the CCFT, Tobin is the faculty advisor for Cabrillo College's GSA Club. For the past three years, Tobin has helped the GSA get established, organize offices, schedule meetings and events, raise the pride flag on Harvey Milk Day and National Coming Out Day, and host annual events like the Transgender Day of Remembrance. They have also facilitated important field trips and training including a trip to a two-spirit inclusive indigenous gathering where queer students could connect with and learn from two-spirited individuals. Tobin has also advocated the GSA's seat on the Cabrillo Rainbow Council, a task force of administration, faculty, staff, and student leaders who ensure Cabrillo integrates LGBTQ+ resources, programming, curricula, and training into existing programs and services. As a Rainbow Council leader, Tobin has played a pivotal role in developing and instituting support for the annual Lavender graduation and Queer Prom which serve to uplift, inspire, and celebrate Cabrillo's LGBTQ+ community.



ZAK KEITH | NOMINEE

they/them/theirs

Advisor, Staff & Peer Group Facilitator, The Diversity Center | Co-lead, Queer Student Union (QSU)

Zak is a radically positive and authentic role model who has united many community organizations like the Diversity Center, Safe Schools, Santa Cruz Pride, and Raíces y Cariño to collectively advocate for queer youth. As a doctorate candidate studying queer youth culture and identity at UCSC, Zak is creating youth groups to pass along their knowledge and demystify the non-binary identity journey. One such group is Genderventures, a monthly gender-diverse group that hosts discussions and creative activities to explore how gender informs their life experiences, and another is Prismatic Gathering, an adventure program with safe, welcoming spaces for youth to connect and decompress. In addition, Zak serves as Co-lead of the QSU and has taken the initiative to identify which Diversity Center queer youth activities are the most effective and why, establishing the Diversity Center's "Theory of Change" to reallocate the center's time, resources, and spending. Zak also performs drag as Rogue Roulette, volunteering their time and talent to Queer Prom, Drag Story Time, and Drag Bingo.

GRAPHIC DESIGN



MADDIE HITZEMAN
mhitzman812@gmail.com



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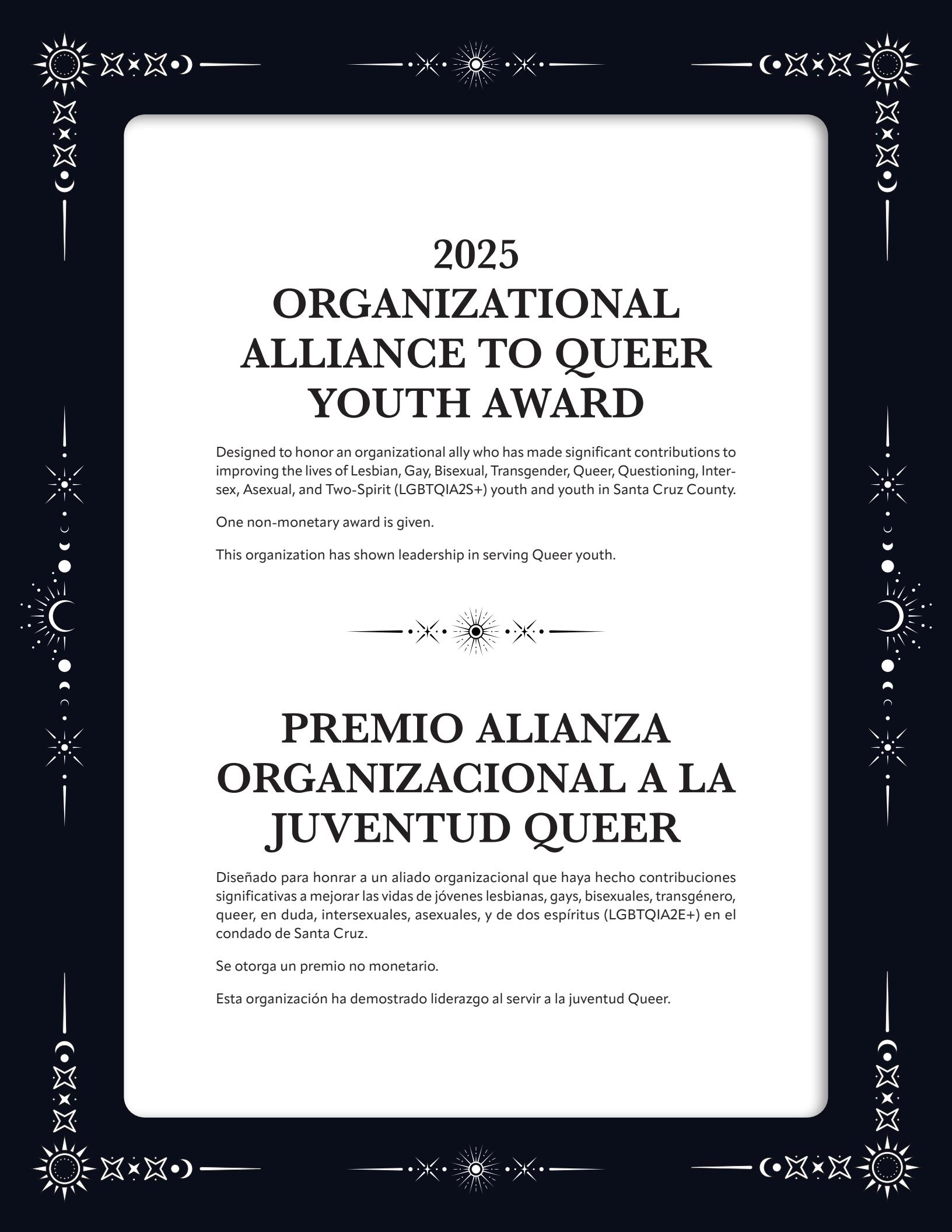
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Temple celebrates all of the QYLA 2025 nominees and awardees — and all who support our amazing leaders.



2025 ORGANIZATIONAL ALLIANCE TO QUEER YOUTH AWARD

Designed to honor an organizational ally who has made significant contributions to improving the lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and Two-Spirit (LGBTQIA2S+) youth and youth in Santa Cruz County.

One non-monetary award is given.

This organization has shown leadership in serving Queer youth.

PREMIO ALIANZA ORGANIZACIONAL A LA JUVENTUD QUEER

Diseñado para honrar a un aliado organizacional que haya hecho contribuciones significativas a mejorar las vidas de jóvenes lesbianas, gays, bisexuales, transgénero, queer, en duda, intersexuales, asexuales, y de dos espíritus (LGBTQIA2E+) en el condado de Santa Cruz.

Se otorga un premio no monetario.

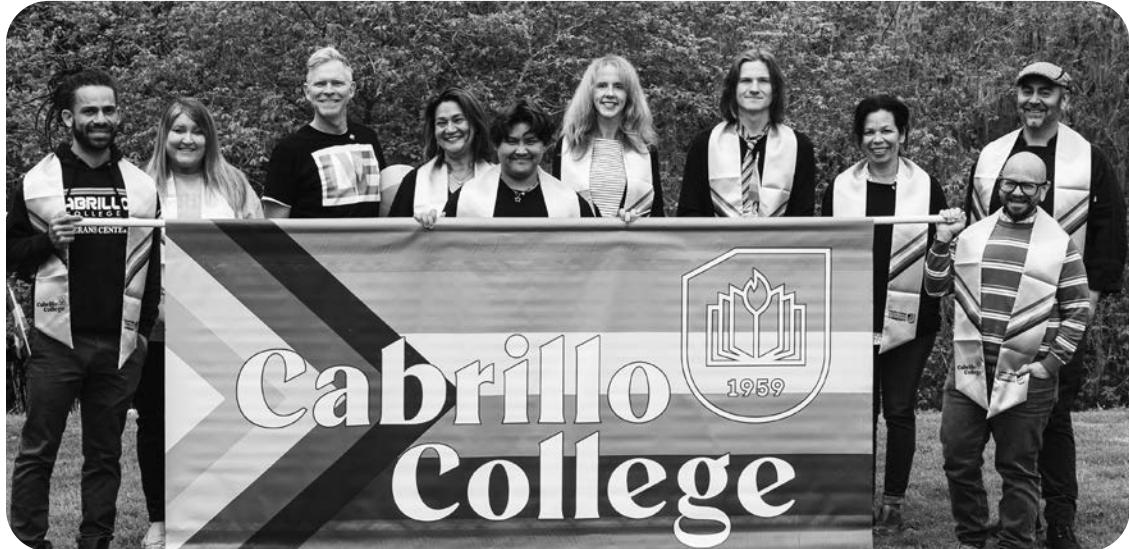
Esta organización ha demostrado liderazgo al servir a la juventud Queer.

RAÍCES Y CARIÑO FAMILY CENTER (RC FAM) | AWARDEE

Established in 2022, the Raíces y Cariño Family Center is an essential part of the Pajaro Valley community, providing a safe space where LGBTQ+ youth and families can feel included and celebrated. From the beginning, the RC Fam has proudly displayed LGBTQ+ signs, offered LGBTQ+ online support in Spanish, and collaborated with organizations like TransFamilies, The Diversity Center, and the Rainbow Defense Coalition (RDC) to host meetings, RDC trainings, and events. The Raíces y Cariño Family Center has also been invited to multiple agencies and schools to educate others about culturally representative LGBTQ+ issues and celebrations. The center has opened their doors to PRISM, a bimonthly GSA community for queer, trans, and ally students as well as the Rainbow Playgroup, a monthly bilingual gathering for LGBTQ+ families with elementary-age children. In 2023, the RC Fam hosted their first Drag Story time, a bilingual event where drag artists read picture books and pose with kids for photos. When an anonymous hate letter was published and protesters targeted the center in response to Drag Story Time, the RC Fam bravely stood with the LGBTQ+ community, modeling how to educate with love and make Watsonville more welcoming to queer youth.



CABRILLO COLLEGE RAINBOW COUNCIL | NOMINEE



The Cabrillo College Rainbow Council is a group of students, staff, faculty, administrators, and leaders dedicated to advocating for greater LGBTQIA2S+ equity on campus through organizational transparency, collaboration, educational tools, and events. Since its inception in 2020, the Rainbow Council has advocated for historic and contemporary issues in curricula; added to Cabrillo Library's collection of books, periodicals, and films; created faculty and staff professional development workshops; hosted events like Queer Prom, Lavender Graduation, and Trans Day of Remembrance; and participated in Santa Cruz and Pajaro Valley Prides. They've collaborated with Cabrillo's Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) Club to sponsor tables at the QYLA ceremony, as well as the Cabrillo Office of Student Equity and the County Office of Education to establish the 2025 Educators Symposium. Most recently, the Rainbow Council worked with Cabrillo's student-led Printmaking Club at the Queer, Trans, and Allied Student Summit, providing free, custom-printed tote bags filled with swag and lovingly printed by hand with a logo designed by one of the summit youth artists.

QUEER INTERSECTIONAL ALLIANCE (QIA) OF PACIFIC COLLEGIATE SCHOOL (PCS) LEADERSHIP TEAM | NOMINEE



The QIA of PCS has grown into a vibrant community due to the dedicated leadership of five individuals known as the "QIA Leadership Team." Hunter Coomes is a veteran leader, acting as a student government liaison and charismatic presenter. Nadia Dribinski serves as the club's communications officer, noticing small details and fine-tuning their messaging. Vivie Zenack delegates and coordinates QIA tasks, anchoring each project with purpose. Cadence Johnson-Swallow is a quiet yet stalwart leader whose problem solving skills make project goals feasible. And Daphne Robertson is the voice of reason, refocusing the group and candidly pointing out possible improvements. Together, this Dream Team has organized annual events such as National Coming Out Day and "Fall Fabu," a school-wide queer festival. They've

also implemented a Winter Market craft fundraiser for the school's affinity groups, established a monthly group session to discuss topics like "coping over the holidays" and "handling stress" in partnership with Encompass Services, collaborated with The 418 Project and the EDI Film and Cultural Center to organize the county-wide "Ready, Set, Glow!" dance, and hosted weekly QIA "Good Queer News" meetings to combat frightening current events.

RENEGADE THEATER CO. | NOMINEE



Former QYLA awardee, Kyle Vasquez, founded The Renegade Theater Co. in 2023 to provide an accepting and safe environment for marginalized groups including queer, trans, neurodivergent, and low-income theater kids to thrive. Renegade fosters collaboration, empathy, and education through experimental art that pushes audiences to think in new ways and step outside their comfort zones. In addition to hosting workshops, theater camps, and performing at least one annual LGBTQ+ fundraising show, Renegade has also collaborated with the Seven Directions Creative Learning Center to establish Friday Night LGBTQIA+ Teen Hangouts, and the Rainbow Choir, a mixed-voice choral ensemble for teen singers who self-identify as intersex, genderqueer, non-binary, or LGBTQIA+. When non-binary, Oklahoma teen Nex Benedict died, Renegade took the initiative to perform a reading of "The Laramie Project" to raise funds for Nex's family and the TransFamilies' Understanding Gender Summit. Renegade prioritizes crew and performers' mental health, ensuring the theater is a supportive and creative collaboration where everyone can be themselves.

**SAN LORENZO VALLEY MIDDLE SCHOOL (SLVMS)
GENDER AND SEXUALITY ALLIANCE (GSA) CLUB | NOMINEE**

The SLVMS GSA Club is dedicated to promoting inclusivity, spreading awareness, and supporting students in the school and broader community. Every Friday at lunch, the GSA Club meets to work on projects, discuss important issues and empower each other, providing a safe haven for LGBTQ+ and allied students. They've also hosted lunch events to include and educate those outside the club. GSA students lead and participate in various community outreach events such as the Queer, Trans, and Allied Student Summit. For the annual winter carnival last year, the GSA petitioned their advisor and principal to act as targets in a water balloon fundraising event for LGBTQ+ charities and The Trevor Project. This year, a club member initiated a "Love is Love" awareness campaign in which students and their families gathered at the intersection of Highway 9 and Graham Hill Road to stand in solidarity for inclusion, acceptance, and love for all individuals, regardless of identity. Their advocacy and passion is not only inspiring but also essential in building a more inclusive and accepting future for all students.

**SANTA CRUZ MUSEUM OF ART AND HISTORY (MAH) | NOMINEE**

The Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History collaborated with The Diversity Center to create a Queer Santa Cruz exhibit featuring archival photos, flyers, testimonials, and ephemera vital to local LGBTQ+ history. The MAH has also presented the Trailblazers Oral History Project, a collection of oral histories documenting and honoring the people who championed the LGBTQ+ movement and courageously laid the groundwork for queer advocacy. When asked to collaborate with a Kirby class studying queer literature, the MAH enthusiastically accepted and planned a custom field trip so students could visit the exhibit, ask questions, and get exclusive access to primary sources like local lesbian magazines. In turn, the MAH team reached out to ask LGBTQ+ youth in the class to speak at events centered around queer women and locals. The MAH team is an incredible collaborator that goes above and beyond to recognize local LGBTQ+ history and progress, engage with the queer community, and inspire positive change with diverse historical representation.

CONGRATULATIONS

to the 2025 QYLA Nominees & Awardees!



Paid for by Gail Pellerin for Assembly 2024 | FPPC #1443589 | PO Box 4100, Santa Cruz CA 95063 | PAID POLITICAL AD

28TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT
PAID FOR BY GAIL PELLERIN



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The first GSAs in
Watsonville and Santa Cruz
developed in 1996.

*Hear the story on the
Queer History podcasts,
for youth, by youth.*

*Santa Cruz County
Queer History Podcast*



SantaCruzPride.org



ZOE

LOFGREN FOR CONGRESS

"IN TOO MANY PLACES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, WE ARE SEEING LGBTQ YOUTH UNDER ATTACK. THESE YOUNG PEOPLE DESERVE SAFE SPACES WHERE THEY CAN HAVE A CHANCE TO THRIVE, BE THEIR AUTHENTIC SELF, AND BECOME THE LEADERS OUR COMMUNITIES AND OUR NATION NEEDS.

THERE IS INCREDIBLE STRENGTH IN OUR DIVERSITY - AND LGBTQ YOUTH BRING A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE AND LIVED EXPERIENCES THAT HELP US TO BUILD A BETTER, MORE UNDERSTANDING AND EMPATHETIC, AND VIBRANT SOCIETY.

I AM SO PROUD OF THE WORK BEING DONE BY THE QUEER YOUTH TASK FORCE IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY - AND CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE QYLA AWARDEES! KEEP DOING YOUR GREAT WORK AND BEING LEADERS IN YOUR COMMUNITIES."

-- CONGRESSWOMAN ZOE LOFGREN



**BE STRONG.
BE RESILIENT.
BE OUTSPOKEN.
BE LEADERS.
BE YOU.**

ZOELOFGREN.COM

Bay Federal Credit Union would like to celebrate the **Queer Youth Leadership Awards** and their service to our community.

Congratulations to all of the award honorees, past, present, and future!

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Queer and Trans Youth
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**YOU
GOT
THIS**

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Congratulations to each 2025 Queer Youth Leadership Awardee and Nominee. Thank you for showing us what it means to live your truth out loud!

Adam Spickler
Cabrillo College Trustee
Pronouns: They | He
Trans | Queer | Progressive
amspickler@yahoo.com
831-588-0692



My experience as a Cabrillo College student helped shape who I am today. Cabrillo is a safe, welcoming, empowering and affordable way to start your college educational career. Visit www.cabrillo.edu for more.

Congratulations to all of the
QYLA 2025 nominees & awardees!



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**Arts Council Santa Cruz County
Celebrates Queer Youth Leaders
and Their Allies!**



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Suicide Prevention Service of the Central Coast

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Congrats QYLA
Nominees & Awardees!

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THANK YOU TO OUR PRESTIGIOUS JUDGING FACILITATORS & JUDGES



GRACIAS A NUESTROS PRESTIGIOSOS FACILITADORES Y JUECES



JEN HASTINGS, MD | JUDGING FACILITATOR
pronouns: Jen

Volunteer Clinical Professor, UCSF Department of Family & Community Medicine | Physician Consultant SafeRx, Health Improvement Partnership | Physician Consultant Transgender Healthcare

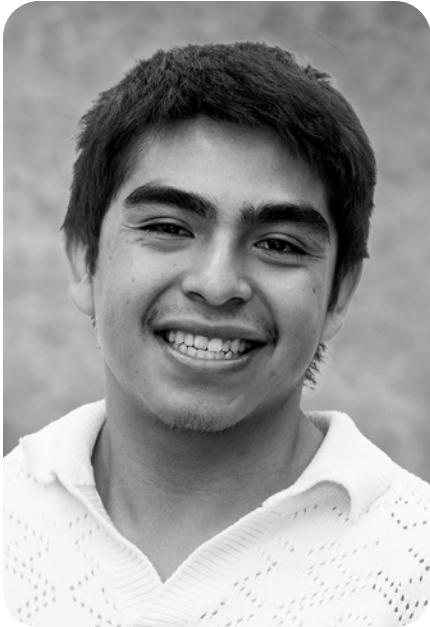
Jen Hastings, MD is a Volunteer Clinical Professor at the UCSF Department of Family and Community Medicine and was the founder and Director of Transgender Healthcare Services for Planned Parenthood Mar Monte from 2003-2018. Jen supported the initial development for the national protocol and guidelines for Planned Parenthood Federation of America. As a queer/genderqueer physician, Jen is involved in research on the reproductive needs and experiences of transgender and gender expansive people in the US, and a national consultant and educator on transgender healthcare, increasing access and understanding. In Santa Cruz, Jen is the physician consultant with SafeRx and the Health Improvement Partnership, working with opioid safety, behavioral health integration, trauma informed care, and mindfulness in medicine.



KATHY CYTRON, LCSW | JUDGING FACILITATOR
she/her/hers

Retired Program Manager, Children's Behavioral Health of Santa Cruz County

Kathy is a fierce advocate for equality for all, especially those in the LGBTQ community. She was at Santa Cruz County Children's Behavioral Health for 27 years and has been recognized by the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors for her leadership in welcoming diversity. Kathy continues to empower and celebrate LGBTQ youth and their families. She goes about her work with a smile on her face, love in her heart, and a deep commitment to social justice.

**ELI ROMERO ORTIGOSA | JUDGE***he/him/his*

2024 Queer Youth Leadership Awardee | Student, Stanford University

Eli Romero Ortigosa is a former QYLA awardee and a first-year student at Stanford University, where he plans to study Comparative Literature. Originally from Oaxaca, Mexico, and now living in Watsonville, California, Eli is passionate about uplifting marginalized voices, particularly within immigrant and LGBTQ+ communities. His lived experiences as a queer immigrant shape his commitment to advocacy, education, and storytelling. He has led youth organizing efforts, facilitated workshops, and supported community-based projects focused on equity and empowerment. Eli believes in the transformative power of language, culture, and collective action. He is dedicated to creating inclusive spaces where others feel seen, valued, and heard. Looking ahead, he hopes to bridge grassroots movements, public policy, and the arts to reimagine a more just and compassionate world.

**ELLIS OLIVAS | JUDGE***they/them/theirs*

2015 Queer Youth Leadership Awardee | Graduate of UC Riverside

As a high school student, Ellis wrote a petition for gender-neutral bathrooms at SVHS for the safety of gender variant students, and helped obtain over 200 signatures. Despite the administration's reluctance, they encouraged students not to give up and the project was finally completed several years later. Ellis was a Queer Youth Leadership Awardee in 2015. While studying sociology at UC Riverside, they were an active participant in the LGBT Resource Center's programs. They also shared their experience with UCR's housing administration as they revised the housing application process to make it more gender inclusive. Now back in the Santa Cruz area, they hope to use their knowledge and additional perspectives gained in college to better understand diverse identities and promote understanding in others.

**JUSTIN CUMMINGS, PH.D. | JUDGE***he/him/his*

Santa Cruz County Supervisor, Third District

Justin Cummings holds bachelor's degrees in Spanish and Biology from Eastern Illinois University and a Ph.D. in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from UCSC. After conducting post-doctoral research on the impacts of climate change in the Florida Everglades, he returned to Santa Cruz in 2015 to help launch two DEI nonprofits at UCSC before entering politics in 2017. He became Santa Cruz's first Black mayor in 2020, leading during the pandemic, social unrest, and wildfires. Elected County Supervisor in 2022, he champions housing affordability, disaster recovery, mental health services, environmental protection, and infrastructure. In 2024, he became Chair of the California Coastal Commission, advocating for environmental protection, sustainable development, and public access to the coast.

**LAUREN FEIN | JUDGE***she/her/ella*

Behavioral Health Director, Santa Cruz County Office of Education (SCCOE)

Lauren Fein is the Behavioral Health Director at the Santa Cruz County Office of Education. With a background as a therapist and a lifelong commitment to supporting young people, she believes deeply in creating spaces where all students — especially queer and marginalized youth — feel seen, safe, and celebrated. Lauren brings a trauma-informed and equity-centered approach to her work, blending clinical expertise with a heart for community building. She is passionate about breaking down barriers to mental health care and helping schools foster environments where every student can thrive. As an ally and advocate, Lauren shows up with compassion, authenticity, and a fierce belief in the power of connection.

**MADELINE ALIAH | JUDGE***she/her/hers*

2024 Queer Youth Leadership Awardee | Student, Cypress High School

Madeline Aliah is a nineteen year old writer and public speaker. Madeline came out as a transfem at age 16, and has been a part of social justice initiatives ever since. Madeline is a 2024 queer youth leadership awardee and two time QYLA emcee. Her chapbook, *This is My Body: Poems by a Teen Transfem* is available on Amazon under her name, and her TEDx talk "How to Create a Safe Space" is available on YouTube alongside her recent speech at a Hands Off rally. This summer she will be interning at S. J. Bryant School in Massachusetts, and hopes to contribute to making the world a safer place for people of all ages to explore who they are.

**DR. SHANE HILL | JUDGE***he/him/his*

Psychologist, Mindfulness Teacher & Artist

Dr. Shane Hill has worked to support the queer/trans/non-binary community and their families for over 29 years in Santa Cruz County. He has worked as a queer youth group facilitator, mental health consultant for the Diversity Center, founder of Queer Camp, co-founder and facilitator of the first Gender Specialist Therapist Group in SC, founder of the SC Transfamily Support Group, provides individual and family therapy for queer people, and has provided numerous gender identity educational trainings to hundreds of therapists, school staff, and organizations in Santa Cruz and throughout California. His current joys are meditation and creating minimalist landscape oil paintings that expand the viewer's Self-awareness.



We stand with all our 2SLGBTQIA+ patients, particularly our **TWO-SPIRIT TRANSGENDER INTERSEX & NONBINARY patients.**

We are committed to providing you with safe and supportive medical and mental health care that is gender affirming, in accordance with California state laws.

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UCSC Student Health Center
Watsonville Community Hospital

Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency Health Centers
Santa Cruz County Children's Behavioral Health
Santa Cruz County Adult Behavioral Health
Santa Cruz Health Information Exchange

Antara Institute Wellness and Training Center
Family Service Agency of the Central Coast
Gender Specialist Consult Group of the Central Coast
Santa Cruz County Chapter of the California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists

The Lotus Collaborative Healing Center
Santa Cruz Therapy Collective
Santa Cruz Wellness Center

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Debra Sloss, LMFT
Jan Sollom-Brotherton, LMFT
Caro Vitale LMFT

2025-2026 Grants, Scholarships, & Leadership Honorariums to LGBTQIA+ Youth and Clubs

In addition to honoring leadership during the 28th Annual Queer Youth Leadership Awards, we honor and celebrate LGBTQIA+ student campus clubs and individuals who are making Santa Cruz County a safer place. And to those contributing to enriching our communities but who are not listed here, we salute you!

Community Foundation Santa Cruz County Diversity Partnership Fund LGBTQIA+ Club Grants

Community Foundation Santa Cruz County's "Diversity Partnership Fund" is proud to announce the 2025 LGBTQIA+ club grants! This year, County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency (HSA) offered a \$10,000 investment to match each grant made with the goal of supporting pride clubs across the county.

Representatives from 24 clubs applied for and were approved for grants to support activities in the upcoming year. These grants, awarded to Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs), Queer-Straight Alliances (QSAs), Sexuality and Gender Alliances (SAGAs), Rainbow Alliances, and other student pride clubs, are opportunities for LGBTQIA+ clubs to request funding for special projects they proposed. A total of \$17,500 was awarded to 24 clubs in May.

Now in its ninth year, the program has provided many Santa Cruz County LGBTQIA+ student clubs with funding for club activities and projects, examples of which include:

- Hosting inclusive community-building events like: student-led lectures and discussions, book clubs & expansion of LGBTQ+ library, movie nights, arts & craft sessions and markets, school-wide events featuring LGBTQIA+ speakers, fundraisers, collaborating with nonprofits and other clubs;
- Celebrating and/or observing awareness-raising events like: LGBTQIA+ History Month, United Against Hate Week, Transgender Awareness Week/Trans Day of Remembrance, Coming Out Day, Pronoun Awareness Day, Harvey Milk Day, Allies Day, and Day of (No) Silence;
- Attending educational forums like the LGBTQIA+ Student Summit, Queer studies field trips, and hosting film festivals that create dialogue for queer students and allies;
- Social events like Pride Day at the Boardwalk, queer prom, movie nights, a drag events, and roller-skating nights.

This year's grant recipients:

High Schools:

Aptos Junior High School Pride Club
Cypress High School GSA
Delta Charter High School QSA
Georgiana Bruce Kirby Preparatory School GSA
Harbor High School QSA
Santa Cruz High School Rainbow Alliance
Scotts Valley High School SAGA
Watsonville High School GSA
Pacific Collegiate School Queer Intersectional Alliance

Middle Schools:

Branciforte Middle School Musqueers
Cesar Chavez Middle School Wonder Club
E.A. Hall Middle School Rainbow Club
Lakeview Middle School QSA
Mission Hill Middle School Pride Club
New Brighton Middle School QSA
Pajaro Middle School Rainbow Alliance
Rolling Hills Middle School D.I.C.E.
San Lorenzo Valley Middle School GSA
Shoreline Middle School SAGA

Elementary Schools:

Gault Elementary School Rainbow Dolphins
Main Street Elementary School Rainbow Club
Santa Cruz Gardens Elementary School SCG Rainbow Club
Soquel Elementary School Rainbow Club
Community:
Raíces y Cariño Family Center PRISM club

The Diversity Partnership Fund at

S COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
For Good. For Ever. For All.



LGBTQ+ Student Rights, Advocacy and Community



Brought to you by The Diversity Center and The Safe Schools Project of Santa Cruz County

My School, My Rights: Free to Learn, Free to Be

Protecting students' freedom to learn and be themselves at school.



Santa Cruz County Office of Education (SCCOE)

Helpful site for LGBTQ+ students and parents — Supporting LGBTQ+ Students and Families - Santa Cruz County Office of Education.



The Diversity Center

The Diversity Center's Youth Programs provide safe, affirming spaces for LGBTQ+ youth and allies to connect, express themselves, and build community through social events, GSA/QSA visits, leadership opportunities, and creative workshops.



Support for LGBTQ+ Students and Families from Santa Cruz County Superintendents



The Safe Schools Project of Santa Cruz County

Helpful site for LGBTQ+ Students, Parents, and Educators. Resources include training staff, Curriculum Guides, GSA List, and the annual Rainbow Conference.



Information on California State Laws Protecting LGBTQ+ Students and Staff, as well as relevant resources.





LGBTQ+ Student Rights, Advocacy and Community



Brought to you by The Diversity Center and The Safe Schools Project of Santa Cruz County

Queer Youth Task Force

The Queer Youth Task Force (QYTF) is comprised of individuals and organizations that work with, or support, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning (LGBTIQ) youth.



Raíces y Cariño

Raíces y Cariño is an equitable, bilingual, inclusive, and safe space for the community to gather and raise their children together. Hosts PRISM, community GSA club for 6th-12th grade students. Located in Watsonville.



TransFamilies of Santa Cruz County

TransFamilies of Santa Cruz County provides information and support for parents and guardians of transgender, nonbinary, and gender expansive children and youth through bi-monthly support group meetings, playgroups, and educational workshops.



Attorney General Bonta: California Schools Will Remain a Welcoming, Inclusive, Safe Place for All

Letter from CA Attorney General Bonta describing rights for LGBTQ+ youth as well as protections and resources in regards to presidential occurrences.



Rainbow Connections

The Rainbow Connections Provider Network offers LGBTQ+ affirming services and supports for youth up to age 25 and their families in Monterey County. No-cost online trainings available through Gender Health Training Institute.



California Department of Education

Instructional guidance, law, and policies for local educational agencies to support LGBTQ+ students.



RECOGNIZING OUR VOLUNTEERS & CORE PRODUCTION TEAM

We thank the community members who donated their time and who supported the project to help make the 2025 Queer Youth Leadership Awards possible:

EMCEES	Izabella Leon Madeline Aliah
DIRECTOR	Isabella Steigman
CATERING	D'La Colmena Market & Catering
DAY OF EVENT LOGISTICS	Maria Dolores Castillo
DECORATIONS	Charlie Kai Dylan Students from Soquel High School QSA
EVENT FILMING	Watsonville High School Video Academy
EVENT SPANISH TRANSLATOR/INTERPRETER	Edna A. Benitez-Maya Jose Ocampo
FLOWERS	Amy Scott, Ace's Flowers
JUDGING FACILITATORS	Jen Hastings, MD Kathy Cytron, LCSW
LOGISTICS COORDINATOR	Melissa Chargin
PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR	Andy Botsford
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Lyndsey Gould
PRODUCERS	Angela Lenth Stuart Rosenstein
PRODUCTION ASSISTANT	Ellis Olivas
PHOTOGRAPHY	Rebecca Stark Photography
PROGRAM BOOKLET PRODUCTION	Maddie Hitzeman
PRONOUNS GUIDE	Many hands, including: Ben Geilhufe, MA, LPCC Jen Hastings, MD Kristen Olafson Levi Kreisa
RED CARPET	Dean Maynard
RED CARPET HOST	Evan Jacques-Maynes
RESOURCE FAIR	Dean Maynard
VIDEO PRODUCTION	Val Mendoza Students from Watsonville High School Video Academy
WEBSITE	Jordan Iversen, Iversen Design

Thank you to Soquel High School Queer Straight Alliance (QSA) for the QYLA 2025 Theme.

QYLA is produced by the Queer Youth Task Force of Santa Cruz County.

RECOGNIZING OUR CO-SPONSORS & SUPPORTERS

A HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO:

Ace's Flowers
Adam Spickler, Trustee, Cabrillo College
American Civil Liberties Union Santa Cruz County Chapter (ACLU)
Antonia Amore-Broccoli, LCSW
Assemblymember Dawn Addis, CA State Assembly, 30th District
Bay Area Municipal Elections Committee (BAYMEC)
Bay Federal Credit Union
Bea Rosenstein
Big Brothers Big Sisters Santa Cruz County
Birds Of A Feather Santa Cruz, Kris Kifer
Black China Bakery
Cabrillo College Office of Student Equity
Cabrillo College Rainbow Council
Capitola-Aptos Rotary Club
Closet Free Radio Show, KZSC
Coffeetopia
Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County
Community Printers
County of Santa Cruz
Cruzio
Dharma's Restaurant, Bernie Shapiro
Dr. Brian Del Core Family Dentistry
Emerging Jedi Award
First 5 Santa Cruz County
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Friends of Kathy Ruiz Goldenkranz
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Gail Pellerin for Assembly
Health Services Agency (HSA)
In Memory of Connor Cockerham
In Memory of Milo Anima
In Memory of Richard Watson-Riley
Iversen Design
James Olivas
Kaiser Permanente
La Selva Beach Community Church
Larry Almonte
Life Lab
Lori Deal
Nonprofit Connection (NPC) Santa Cruz County
Out In Our Faith
Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD)
Phillip Gomez & Van Boughner
Rebecca Stark Photography
Ron Indra
Safe Schools Project
San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District (SLVUSD)
Santa Cruz Area Radical Faeries
Santa Cruz City Schools (SCCS)
Santa Cruz County Office of Education (SCCOE)
Santa Cruz Pride
Santa Cruz Public Libraries (SCPL)
Senator John Laird, California State Senate, 17th District
Sheri & Richard Watson-Riley
Scotts Valley Unified School District (SVUSD)
Temple Beth El
The Diversity Center
The Ugly Mug
TransFamilies of Santa Cruz County
Trans Teen Project
United Way of Santa Cruz County
Valley Churches United
Your Future Is Our Business (YFIOB)
Zoe Lofgren for Congress



MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES



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Free and confidential access to crisis counselors 24/7 and 365 days a year.
Call 1-800-273-8255.

MOBILE EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM FOR YOUTH (MERTY)

MERTY provides crisis support services to youth 21 and under in Santa Cruz County. The clinical team will come to you and can provide services at safe sites including schools and other community settings, including after-school programs and faith based organizations. To request MERTY services, call 1-800-952-2335 Monday-Friday between 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

NAMI SANTA CRUZ COUNTY HELP LINE

Receive support and access to local resources. Leave a message and receive a call back within 24 hours from a trained volunteer. Call (831) 427-8020.



THE TREVOR PROJECT

The Trevor Project is the leading national organization focused on crisis and suicide prevention efforts among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning youth. Free and confidential. Call 1-866-488-7386 or Text "Start" to 678-678. You can also chat online and access more mental health resources at thetrevorproject.org



TREVOR LIFELINE

866.488.7386

If you're thinking about suicide, you deserve immediate help. Call us anytime 24/7/365.



TREVOR TEXT

Text "Start" to 678-678

Talk to a Trevor counselor via text message Monday – Friday 12-7pm PDT.



TREVOR CHAT

TrevorChat.org

Online instant messaging with a TrevorChat counselor everyday 12-7pm PDT.



Visit QYLA.org/resources
for additional information

Congratulations to the Nominees and Awardees of the 2025 Queer Youth Leadership Awards!

We celebrate your leadership and service to our community!



A PROGRAM OF



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Being yourself is
one of the **bravest**
things you can do.



Big Brothers Big Sisters.
OF MONTEREY BAY
Empowering youth in Monterey,
San Benito & Santa Cruz Counties
www.bbbsmontereybay.org

ENROLL NOW



THE DIVERSITY CENTER

The Diversity Center inspires and advocates for the LGBTQ+ people of Santa Cruz and Monterey counties by providing critical services, spaces, education, and events that enhance our community's well-being allowing individuals to build resiliency and thrive.



Our events and services for LGBTQ+ and allied youth, families, adults, and seniors provide opportunities for:

- Identity Exploration
- Affirming Wellness Practices
- Advocacy Skill Development
- Inclusive Education
- Support Networks

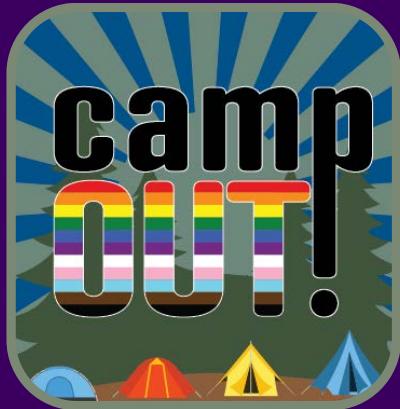
Visit us at diversitycenter.org to learn more!



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