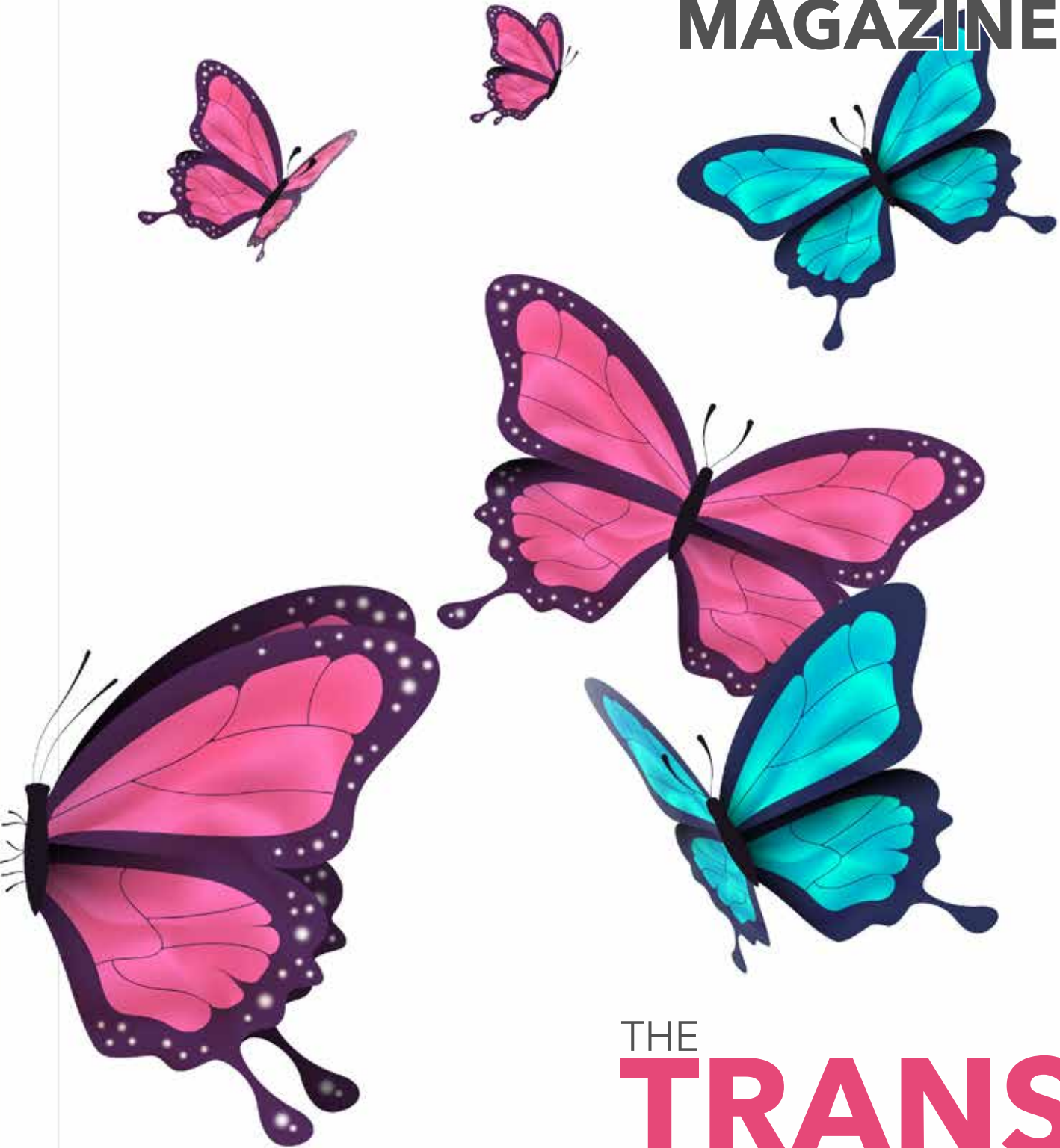


DOUBLE ISSUE

BORREGO HEALTH MAGAZINE



THE
TRANS

ISSUE

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We are also thankful for the collaboration of: Dr. Patric Schine, Nohemi Lopez, and everyone that directly and indirectly helped us put this issue together.

Would you like to collaborate or recognize a staff member?
Please, send us your article or photo of you and the peer you
are recognizing along with the reason why.
Submit to:
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TRIUMPH

Borrego Health's Trans Department Speaks Up!

THE DEPARTMENT

By: Dr. Antonia "Toni" D'orsay, PhD
Director of Trans Services

The Trans Department began in 2017 with the hire of Dr. Patric Schine, DNP, FNP, as the Director of Trans Medicine. In 2018, Dr. Antonia "Toni" D'orsay, PHD, MS, MA, was hired to design and implement a service model that would achieve the many goals derived from the needs of the trans population of the region - for all three counties, around 56,000 people. She is the Director of Trans Services.

In 2019, C. Michael Woodward, MPH, was brought in as the Trans Community Health Manager, and in the last three months, we have been joined by Laken Moreno, Mateo Williamson, and Nohemi Lopez as our Trans Navigators, each serving a particular region, with a focus on the deeply underserved populations in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties.

Dr. Schine and Dr. D'orsay worked hard for a bit over two years to secure a Center of Excellence designation, to determine a very forward-thinking outlook and philosophy, and to start the process of training, aiding patients, and helping other departments to serve trans people.

Our program is one of the top ten programs in the nation among all medical services based on population size alone, and we are unique in that we do not rely directly on the same funding structure. We approach trans medicine as a family practice model, and we hold that any trans person should be able to go to any clinic within Borrego Health and receive the same level of care as any other clinic. We are being consulted by Universities and other agencies, locally and nationally, because our program is ahead of the curve, and our team is recognized as experts in the issues and needs of trans people.

The DTM, as we call it, has a team site that is open to all Borrego Health employees, and we



have some things on there that you may find useful, and every month there will be something new to see. Right now, we are very proud of the Clinical Quick Reference, designed for providers and nursing staff to help them out when treating trans patients. There is also our New Patient Guide, which explains to new patients what they can expect and how we operate.

We follow the Standards of Care, Version 7, of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health.

Dr. Schine has been recognized for his service to the community in several locations, and chose to come to Borrego Health because of the organization's desire to build a world class system of care.

Dr. D'orsay was a part of the team that created the standards of care, and has worked with the United Nations on Women's Rights and Human Rights, as well as presented to and been recognized as an expert on Trans Lives by the White House in 2013.

Michael Woodward has served as the Director of the largest Transgender Conference in the world for three consecutive years before coming to Borrego Health.

In less than three years, we have built a program that is the envy of trans programs across the nation that have run for decades. And we are just getting started.

Why is there a Department of Trans Medicine? Some of you are familiar with us, some of you have only heard about us, and some of you are just now learning of us. We are a division of the Specialty Department, with a focus on trans healthcare. We touch every clinic, and every role, and we are recently staffed with enough people to begin making some significant impact. So why is there a department dedicated to this?

The answer starts with a bit of long history that takes us back to the late 1800's. It moves through the decades of science and research and medicine that are the foundation of trans medicine today, often with many errors and mistakes and several setbacks.

The history of trans medicine is over 125 years old, and it is only in the last 20 years that there has been a shift in the way that trans people are dealt with by medical providers and behavioral health providers. The years in between are filled with actions and decisions and ways of being that were harmful to trans people, and created a deep and abiding hostility to medical providers even as trans people must interact with them.

Yet much of that old information remains in the minds of providers, insurance companies, and even trans people themselves. This perpetuates some harm. In 1995, a young trans woman

named Tyra Hunter was injured as a passenger in a car accident. The injuries were grave.

Emergency medical technicians at the scene of the accident uttered derogatory epithets and withdrew medical care after cutting open Tyra's pants and discovering that she had a penis, and ER staff at DC General Hospital subsequently provided dilatory and inadequate care. She died.

Recently, a trans man went into a hospital with complaints of pain in his lower abdomen. He had been off testosterone for a while because he could not afford it, and had engaged in unprotected sex. The Hospital, not paying attention to his stated experience as a transgender person, did not conduct a pregnancy test. As a result, he miscarried.

In 1965, Medicare and Medicaid were brought into being. The surgeries for trans people and the medical care for trans people, at that time, had been going on already for over 40 years. They both covered trans medicine and needs. Several locations around the country were specialized in this treatment. In 1981, an ethicist and a famous psychiatrist worked to remove that coverage from Medicaid and Medicare, and, without any evidence, had the procedures declared "experimental" and "cosmetic."

It was the Affordable Care Act that restored some of that coverage; but even today, it is not present across most of the United States. This is important because for trans youth the experience of puberty is damaging in a way that endures their entire lives, and creates hardships that can be avoided. There are a lot of scary sounding articles, and a lot of bad information that can be found in news reports and even medical journals these days. There is a concentrated, ongoing effort to block medical access for trans people, to create barriers and strip funding.

Until Borrego Health arrived, no one was doing trans youth health in any of our regions. The trans department exists to show that we rise above that, and we care for our patients, we are the ones who provide the best possible care in the best possible way to those who are often the least able to access it.



Dr. Patric Schine, DNP, FNP

(He, him)

Medical Director
Department of Trans Medicine

Dr. Schine is the Medical Director of the Department of Trans Medicine. Dr. Schine has been working with the LGBTQ+ community for more than 20 years, with a focus on transgender medicine for the last 14 years. While in private practice in Phoenix, he served the largest transgender patient population in the state, with services including a free, monthly clinic for those patients who couldn't afford office visits. Among his many scholarly activities, Dr. Schine developed "Trans 101 for Providers: A Lecture on Medical Transgender Care" as an introduction to medical care for those who identify as transgender.

He has lectured around the country, providing trans-competent recommendations to staff at major organizations that include VIIV Healthcare. Patric earned his Masters of Nursing/Family Nurse Practitioner degree from the University of Phoenix in 2002 and completed his Doctor of Nursing Practice at Arizona State University in 2010, focusing on education about, and treatment of, sexually transmitted infections. He has been faculty with Brandman University in Irvine for 6 years, most recently serving as Director of the Family Nurse Practitioner Program in the Marybelle and S. Paul Musco School of Nursing and Health Professions.



Antonia E. "Toni" D'orsay, PhD

(She, her)

Director of Trans Services

Toni is the Director of Trans Services, focusing on developing the strategic programs within Specialty services, beginning with services to and for the transgender community. She is a recognized expert on the Trans Lives, is of mixed race, a veteran of the US Army, a sociologist and psychologist, and has worked at local, state, regional, national, and international levels in human rights, infrastructure development, predictive modeling systems, and Transgender Rights and Latinx Rights in particular. She holds a doctorate in sociology, and master's degrees in religion and psychology (clinical and research).

Toni is also the creator and founder of The Trans 100, the former Executive Director of This Is HOW, which she grew from a small housing and substance abuse charity into the largest trans organization in Arizona; was the principal organizer for the State and National fight against several anti-trans bills in Arizona; and has worked with both the Obama administration White House and the World Health Organization.



Who Needs a "TRANS AWARENESS MONTH" Anyway?

By: C. Michael Woodward, MPH
Trans Community Health Manager

It's been 20 years since Gwen Smith, a transgender woman from San Francisco, founded the Transgender Day of Remembrance on November 20 to memorialize the murder of another trans woman Rita Hester, the year before. Twenty years ago, most of you reading this article had probably never heard the word "transgender," I'm guessing. Today, it's a different story. Despite unprecedented new levels of awareness about transgender people, still, transgender people are facing unprecedented levels of violence and hatred. And, regardless of the monumental progress that has been made toward trans equality in those 20 years, every single day trans people still are rejected by their families, fired from their jobs, booted from their faith communities, and assaulted in their own homes.

So, what's the point of Trans Awareness Month? Awareness is a gift to humanity in a life-changing, "pay-it-forward" kind of way.

With Awareness comes Understanding.

While we certainly make the front-page news a lot more than we used to, a 2016 Pew survey found that less than 16% of Americans personally know someone who is openly transgender. That leaves room for so much misunderstanding and ignorance.

Those of you who have heard my story know that even I really had no understanding of my own trans identity until I was 36 years old, when someone I'd known for quite some time began transitioning right in front of me. It was this gift of Awareness he gave me that helped me to better understand myself. That was also 20 years ago, and I haven't looked back for even one second.

With Awareness comes Acceptance.

Tucson, Arizona was, surprisingly, one of the first cities in the country to add gender identity to its anti-discrimination protections. In 1999, (also 20 years ago!), there was an effort by the Tucson City Council to add some new protected classes to the city's Non-Discrimination ordinance, but gender identity was not among them. When

the late trans community leader Alexander John Goodrum got wind of this, he went to the meeting to ask why not. When he asked why not, the answer was not “We don’t have enough votes” or “We don’t think Tucson is ready for that.” The answer was, no one thought of it. “No one told us we needed to.” When Alexander gave them the gift of Awareness, the city’s leaders saw this as a no-brainer and passed the new ordinance with a unanimous vote.

Perhaps the most important thing that comes with Awareness is Responsibility.

Despite that city ordinance he helped to change, Alexander faced excruciating discrimination when he presented himself for treatment for major depression at a local behavioral health facility three years later. He died by suicide while an in-patient less than three weeks later. No one took responsibility for preventing his death. Some, in fact, encouraged it, he told me on our final visit.

Alexander was my friend and mentor, and I still miss him every day.

Those of us who do this work to educate the world about transgender lives can talk forever about the need to create change, but we need you to do more than listen. We need you to act. It is your responsibility - regardless of your identity, regardless of your orientation, regardless of your age, your race, your religion, your class, your job title, or your ability - to do whatever it is in your power to do to make things better. It doesn’t have to be big. It just has to be you. Just show up.

With Awareness comes Equity.

When every little “boy” who wants to wear a dress to school is safe from bullying; when every trans man has access to culturally appropriate sexual health care without fear of ridicule or insult; when every murder and hate crime based on perceived queerness is investigated and prosecuted with diligence, passion, and respect; when every trans woman of color is able to live and work somewhere other than the streets to survive; and when every human person is entitled to equal protection under every law in every state and every nation without having to ask why not, we might not need a Trans Awareness Month. I’m guessing it won’t be next year.

Thank you, Borrego Health, for your national leadership in this vital, life-saving effort to create a sense of belonging for those who struggle to find it.



C. Michael Woodward, MPH

(He, him)

Trans Community Manager



Michael is the Trans Community Health Manager. In this role, he is responsible for developing collaborative relationships with outside service providers relating to LGBTQ+ services and specialty care; creating cooperative referral and care networks; and championing the overall patient experience regarding service navigation and support. Michael brings two decades of advocacy experience and cultural expertise to Borrego Health. He is the former director of the Gender Odyssey conference and an adjunct instructor at Tacoma Community College. Michael served on the City of Tucson Commission on GLBT Issues for five years and is a founding member of The University of Arizona President’s LGBT Advisory Council, where he helped to develop the nation’s first trans-inclusive public university restroom access policy. Michael has published myriad books, articles, and blogs, most notably contributing the title essay to the anthology, “Manning Up: Transsexual Men on Finding Brotherhood, Family, and Themselves” (Transgress Press, 2014). He holds a BS in Public and Corporate Communications from Butler University and earned both a Master of Public Health Policy and Management degree and a Graduate Certificate in Collaborative Governance from the University of Arizona. By night, Michael is also an accomplished vocalist, former lead singer of the band Too Much Information, and a founding member of the musical comedy troupe Musical Mayhem Cabaret in Tucson.

Nohemi Lopez

(She, her or They, them)

Transgender Navigator Specialist
Riverside and San Diego Counties



Nohemi is the Transgender Navigator Specialist for Riverside and San Diego Counties. A native of San Bernardino, Nohemi is dedicated to the social and economic well-being of her community and is regularly involved in grassroots movements surrounding its progress, and also volunteers as a facilitator for Rainbow Pride Youth Alliance’s Caregiver support groups. Nohemi has two B.A. in Psychology and Human Development, and is working towards an MSW. Her passion lies in social justice, and inclusive sexual health education for youth of all identities. She lives at home with her blended family, including her son. Nohemi is fluent in Spanish.

We are A Circle,
working together to
make sure that trans
patients and their
families get the care
and attention they
deserve in a welcoming
environment!

CUSTOMER SERVICE & TRANS PATIENTS

By: Dr. Antonia "Toni" D'orsay, PhD
Director of Trans Services

The standards of Compassion, Attitude, Communication, Appearance, Sense of Ownership, and Teamwork all have aspects that touch on trans patient service - but the first three are especially important. Compassion is important because people often forget the tremendous anxiety, stress, and hurt that trans people constantly deal with in their daily lives. Using the wrong name or wrong pronoun for a trans patient shows to the patient that you don't care about them, and for trans people, this is like being stung by a bee when you are allergic to bee stings. Only it happens all the time.

Attitude is important because that is what lets us recognize that we need to be aware and alert to the needs of our patients - all of our patients. It means being prepared for them, and knowing that we are there to avoid causing harm. We are committed to do what is needed to make sure they have a great experience.

Communication is important because our trans patients have to negotiate a lot of our health-care system, and do not understand things like why referrals can take a while or why they might need an HPV shot or a cervical exam. By letting them know what to expect and how the process works, we give them a sense of knowledge about their own care that is important to them and helps them feel welcomed and cared for.

In our badge, the Always Events include Introducing yourself to the patient. One way to signal that you are great at serving trans people is to introduce yourself and share what your pronouns are - she/her, he/him, they/them, etc. (You might consider adding your pronouns to your email signature.)

Greeting a patient by name means using the right name for the patient. Their insurance card may say Thomas Wilkins, but their name may be Julie Moore. The name they want you to use is the name you should always use.

H.E.A.R.T. also gets into the act here!
Hear: listen to the patient when they tell you what their name is or their pronoun is - and then use it.
Empathize: be aware that, for most of our trans patients, you represent a scary thing that they have heard will hurt them (for most trans people, going to the doctor is a terrifying experience), but is also the only way they can get the lifesaving treatments that they need.
Acknowledge and Apologize: when you use the wrong pronoun or name. Let them know you are aware you did it, and apologize to them for it, and then keep going on. That won't lessen the sting, but it will make it more likely they will be better about it.
Take Responsibility: is also about making sure that you document the right name and the right pronouns in the system. You can ask your regional trans navigator about that!

We are A Circle, working together to make sure that trans patients and their families get the care and attention they deserve in a welcoming environment!



OUR
LOSSES
THIS YEAR

This month, the Department of Trans Medicine has filled the company newsletter with several articles.

November 20th is the International Transgender Day of Remembrance. The Transgender Day of Remembrance, or TDoR, was set aside to memorialize those who were killed due to anti-transgender hatred or prejudice. The event is held in November to honor Rita Hester, whose murder on November 28th, 1998 kicked off the "Remembering Our Dead" web project and a San Francisco candlelight vigil in 1999. Rita Hester's murder – like most anti-transgender murder cases – has yet to be solved.

Although not every person represented during the Day of Remembrance self-identified as transgender – that is, as a transsexual, cross-dresser, or otherwise gender-variant – each was a victim of violence based on bias against transgender people. Additionally, this tally each year is always low and small, as we depend on media reports, which are often not accurate or disrespectful or outright hateful.

Today, the deaths of those based on anti-transgender hatred or prejudice are largely ignored. In 2019, the worldwide average of murders of trans people is more than 1 every single day; a trans person has died due to transgender-based hate or prejudice, regardless of any other factors in their lives. This trend shows no sign of abating, and over the last eight years has steadily increased.

The Transgender Day of Remembrance serves several purposes. It raises public awareness of hate crimes against transgender people, an action that current media doesn't perform. Day of Remembrance publicly mourns and honors the lives of our brothers and sisters who might otherwise be forgotten.



Through the vigil, we express love and respect for our people in the face of national indifference and hatred. Day of Remembrance reminds non-transgender people that we are their sons, daughters, parents, friends and lovers. Day of Remembrance gives our allies a chance to step forward with us and stand in vigil, memorializing those of us who've died by anti-transgender violence.

We encourage anyone who seeks to learn more to attend a vigil near them. Here is a list of vigils.



RIVERSIDE

Sunday, November 17
Transgender Day of Remembrance
5:00-6:00pm

First Congregational Church
3504 Mission Inn Ave, Riverside, CA 92501

Tuesday, November 19
Tuesday Talk: Let's Talk about TDOR
5:00-6:00pm

Costo Hall, UCR Campus
900 University Ave, Riverside, CA 92521



PALM SPRINGS

Wednesday, November 20
Vigil at 5:00pm

Palm Springs City Hall
3200 E Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs, CA 92262



SAN DIEGO

Wednesday, November 20
6:00-9:00pm

San Diego LGBT Community Center
3909 Centre St, San Diego, CA 92103

Dana Martin, 31, a Black transgender woman, was fatally shot in Montgomery, Alabama, on January 6. Reports stated that she was found in a roadside ditch in her vehicle and pronounced dead at the scene. Daroneshia Duncan-Boyd, an Alabama-based trans advocate, said that “she was a person that was loved by many.”



Jazzaline Ware, a Black transgender woman, was found dead in her Memphis apartment in March. Her death is being investigated as a homicide, according to The Advocate. “Our community in Memphis is mourning the death of Jazzaline Ware, a Black trans woman and beloved friend,” said the Transgender Law Center in a press release. Further details are unknown as of May 31, 2019.



Ashanti Carmon, 27, a Black transgender woman, was fatally shot in Prince George’s County, Maryland, on March 30. “Until I leave this Earth, I’m going to continue on loving her in my heart, body, and soul,” said Philip Williams, Carmon’s fiancé. “She did not deserve to leave this Earth so early, especially in the way that she went out.”



Paris Cameron, 20, a Black transgender woman, was among three people killed in a horrific anti-LGBTQ shooting in a home in Detroit on May 25, according to local reports. Alunte Davis, 21, and Timothy Blancher, 20, two gay men, were found dead at the scene and Cameron was taken to the hospital, where she died from her injuries. Two other victims were also shot but survived. “This case illustrates the mortal danger faced by members of Detroit’s LGBTQ community, including transgender women of color,” Fair Michigan President Alanna Maguire said.



Chynal Lindsey, 26, a Black transgender woman, was found dead in White Rock Lake, Dallas, with signs of “homicidal violence” on June 1, according to police. The Dallas Police Department has reached out to federal law enforcement to aid in the investigation. As of June 4, no further details were available.



Chanel Scurlock, 23, a Black transgender woman, was found fatally shot in Lumberton, North Carolina, on June 6. Few details are yet public about the crime, but police told a local news outlet they have “great leads” in their investigation. “RIP baby,” wrote a friend on Facebook. “You [lived] your life as you wanted. I’m proud of you for being unapologetically correct about your feelings and expectations of YOU.”



Claire Legato, 21, a Black transgender woman, was fatally shot in Cleveland on April 15. Local media reports that Legato was shot in the head after an argument broke out between her mother and the suspect. She was taken to a nearby hospital and died from her injuries on May 14. Friends and family took to social media to mourn Legato’s death, remembering her as someone who was “full of life.”



Muhlaysia Booker, 23, a Black transgender woman, was fatally shot in Dallas on May 18. Local media reported that Booker was found dead, lying face down with a gunshot wound near a golf course in east Dallas. In April, Booker was viciously attacked in what Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings described as “mob violence.” Officers say that there is no indication as of May 20, 2019, that the April attack is linked to Booker’s killing.



Michelle “Tamika” Washington, 40, a Black transgender woman, was fatally shot in Philadelphia on May 19. Police responded to reports of shots fired in North Philadelphia’s Franklinville neighborhood, according to the Philadelphia Gay News. Washington, who was also known by the name Tamika, was found with several gunshot wounds and transported to Temple University Hospital, where she was pronounced dead. She is remembered by friends and loved ones as a beloved sister and “gay mother.”



Zoe Spears, 23, a Black transgender woman, was found lying in the street with signs of trauma near Eastern Avenue in Fairmount Heights, Maryland, and later pronounced dead on June 13, according to local reports. “She was my daughter – very bright and very full of life,” transgender advocate Ruby Corado, the founder and executive director of Casa Ruby, told HRC. “Casa Ruby was her home. Right now, we just want her and her friends and the people who knew her to know that she’s loved.”



Brooklyn Lindsey, 32, a Black transgender woman, was found dead on the front porch of an abandoned home in Kansas City, Missouri, on June 25, according to local news reports. “I love you, Brooklyn Lindsey,” wrote a friend on Twitter. “I shall live on for you. Rest in power, sista.”



Denali Berries Stuckey, 29, a Black transgender woman, was found fatally shot in North Charleston, South Carolina, on July 20. “I lost my best friend, first cousin,” wrote a family member on Facebook. “We were more than cousin. We were like brother and sisters. I love you so much, Pooh.”



Tracy Single, 22, a Black transgender woman, was killed in Houston on July 30. "Rest in power and peace Tracy," wrote Monica Roberts, Houston-based transgender advocate. "You were taken away from us way too soon."



Bubba Walker, 55, a Black transgender woman, was killed in Charlotte, North Carolina, in late July. Walker was reported missing on July 26. She is remembered by friends and family as "one of those people who was really fun to be around. She was very kind and she loved helping people."



Kiki Fantroy, 21, a Black transgender woman, was fatally shot in Miami on July 31. Fantroy's mother remembered her as having "a heart of gold" and being "a very loving person." She also pleaded for justice for her daughter, saying, "My baby, my baby. Please help bring justice to my baby."



Bee Love Slater, 23, was brutally murdered in Clewiston, Florida, on September 4. Slater is remembered by loved ones as someone "with a really, really sweet heart" who "never harmed anyone."



Jamagio Jamar Berryman, a Black gender non-conforming person, was killed in Kansas City, Kansas, on September 13. Local activists and community members joined family and friends at a vigil and took to social media to mourn Berryman's loss.



Itali Marlowe, 29, a Black transgender woman was shot multiple times and found by police in the driveway of a local home in Houston on September 20. She was transported to a nearby hospital where she was pronounced dead, as reported by Monica Roberts of TransGriot.



Jordan Cofer, 22, was among the nine victims killed in a mass shooting in Dayton, Ohio, on August 4. While Cofer was only out to a handful of close friends and used the pronouns he/him/his on his social media profiles, he is remembered by friends as "extremely bright" and "well-liked." A friend told Splinter News that "Jordan was probably one of the sweetest people you would ever meet, a true saint, but he was also very scared constantly. He tried to give the best to everyone."



Pebbles LaDime "Dime" Doe, 24, a Black transgender woman, was killed in Allendale County, South Carolina, on August 4. She was found dead in a car parked in a driveway, according to reports. Doe's friends and family remembered her as having a "bright personality," and being someone who "showed love" and who was "the best to be around."



Bailey Reeves, 17, a Black transgender teen, was fatally shot in Baltimore, Maryland, on September 2. As of September 6, little is known about the circumstances surrounding her death.



Brianna "BB" Hill, 30, was fatally shot in Kansas City on October 14. She was pronounced dead when officers arrived on the scene. Kansas City Police Capt. Tim Hernandez told local press that the alleged shooter remained at the scene until they arrived. She was a beloved member of her community, a fan of the Kansas City football team and loved spreading joy by sharing funny videos on her Facebook page.



Johana 'Joa' Medina, 25, died at a hospital in El Paso, Texas just hours after being released from ICE custody. She suffered severe health complications that went untreated while she was in detention, according to Diversidad Sin Fronteras. Her exact cause of death is not yet known.



Layleen Polanco, who was found dead in a cell at Riker's Island on June 7.



When I Chose You.

By: Mateo Williamson
Transgender Navigator Specialist | Coachella Valley Region

A year ago I sat down with my therapist and there was an empty chair in the room. The theme of the session was this: "Sitting across from you is yourself at eight years old. What would you tell that child today?" When you are faced with your inner child, suddenly your self-criticism fades away as empathy and compassion find their way into the forefront.

When I talk with trans youth, it's hard not to see myself at that age. I see the child standing in a store, looking longingly at the boys' clothes. Or a birds-eye view of the teen holding onto a helmet outside the skate park. It often felt as though life itself was off-limits, and it was stifling.

I was 12 years old when I saw a transgender man on TV for the first time. He was walking on the beach with his shirt off, and I immediately knew that was my freedom in front of me. I went to a therapist who tried to help me embrace my feminine side, and I held onto a lot of shame. I was 20 years old when I finally came out, and it was terrifying. At the time, no transgender care was covered as medically necessary—not mental health, not hormones, and certainly not surgeries. I called 20 different primary care offices, and the words were always the same: "I'm sorry, but we don't do that kind of care here." I often had to drive hours away, which took away from work and school. I spent several hours a week on the phone trying to coordinate in-network providers, billing issues, and all the hoops and letters to jump through.

Rules embraced by insurance companies at the time required me to live and dress as a man for a year, and to successfully integrate myself into society in order to prove my readiness to start hormones. It was a cruel thing to do. But I made sure to fill out my depression scales correctly and indicate that things were fine. My life depended on it.

When I broke down in the office towards

the end of this 12-month process, my psychiatrist shared with the physician on the day I was supposed to start testosterone that I was just too consistently sad. She would not sign off on her letter. I had to find new doctors and start the process again out of pocket. It became dangerous.

When I hear the song by Sara Bareilles, "I Choose You," I think of our providers and our team. As I've lived in different parts of the country, I've always felt like I had to convince others to take me on as a patient. It's important for a person's sense of dignity to know that somebody wants to care for you; that you're not a burden. I feel that our transgender patients are loved, valued, and embraced at Borrego Health.

I think what will change the healthcare landscape for transgender people is a widespread invitation to others in medicine to walk this journey with us. We won't ever know everything about trans care, and that can be daunting, but it's exciting. With our work, the healing extends beyond the clinic doors and out into the community. We are a family, walking as one with our patients, and we can be a source of strength for one another.

Mateo Williamson

(He, him)

Transgender Navigator Specialist
Coachella Valley Region



Mateo is the Transgender Navigator Specialist for the Coachella Valley region. He will be working primarily at the Stonewall, DHS Specialty, and Centro Medico clinics. Mateo attended school in Tucson and Chicago, and came out as trans eight years ago. He found support in Tucson's trans community and wants to share that sense of belonging with others. He is passionate about youth advocacy and "mental health for all by involving all." Mateo worked with migrants for four years across the Nogales, Sonora border and with homeless youth in Newark. He is a fan of Ignatian Spirituality and Taoism and has a love for the desert and Duranguense music. He was a rattlesnake wrangler in college and a scorpion sting specialist with Poison Control. He has been stung three times, which made him highly qualified for the job.

You belong here just as much as the rest of us.

By: Laken Zitsch, MA
Transgender Navigator Specialist
Western Riverside & San Bernardino Region

As we all know, patient care takes a large variety of skills: compassion, care, attentiveness. Yet, when working with the transgender community these skills and our patience is sometimes put to the test. Trans patients can come across agitated, uncooperative, and unyielding to most cisgender people - but have you ever really reflected on the "why" this happens? We come to work to do our jobs and do our best in the process. We rarely think of little else that lies outside of what that operation is - but when we do this we are actually complacent in creating more harm against those in the transgender community.

Here is why:

As a transgender woman myself, I can speak from experience when I say coming out as transgender is one of the scariest things I have ever had to do. The fear of how others would react to the news was accompanied by thoughts of how I would look, what I would feel like, when would I start hormones, what would my job say? Would I be fired? Would people accept me?

It was all so overwhelming. These thoughts weren't me having a bad day either; they were a never ending, constant, torment for me. My entire life was about to be turned upside down. Despite that, there was nothing that could keep me from living my authentic life. Couple these thoughts with the staggering

statistics that links misconceptions about gender identity to homelessness, drug dependency, and suicidal ideation - well, we have a big problem on our hands. Transgender people are facing mountains of barriers that rest in their way all because they are simply trying to fit into a system that constantly rejects and invalidates them. All of this pain and fear and uncertainty; is it not understandable where some of the typical "headaches" come from.

At the end of the day it comes down to not only doing our jobs - but why we do our jobs. We are here to help people. We are the people who take the most disadvantaged and marginalized in our communities and we heal them.

We do more than heal their physical illnesses. We heal their spirits. We heal all areas of health and community - and that's what make us special. That is what makes us human. Our compassion for those struggling is what Borrego Health was founded to do. So I urge you: find a trans navigator; have a chat with us. We can talk to you about our own personal experiences. We can give you tips and guidance on how to work with our community. A community that you belong to as well. You belong here just as much as the rest of us. We are a family and family never waivers. It is forgiving, kind, and understanding. Family is forever.

Family is Borrego Health.



Laken Zitsch, MA (She, her)

Transgender Navigator Specialist
Western Riverside & San Bernardino Region

Laken is the transgender navigator specialist for Western Riverside & San Bernardino Counties at Borrego Health's Department of Transgender Medicine. She was raised in Southeast Tennessee. She moved to Southern California about three years ago and started her gender transition in August of 2018. She loves to travel, spend time with friends, shop, and get her nails done. This past year she was crowned Ms. Orange County Pride 2019-2020 and with this platform she advocates for Transgender Rights and recognition, a call to action around the atrocities we see every day against our communities. Her ultimate goal in life is to love, live authentically, and show people every day that being transgender is a portion of our lives that comes with many challenges, but despite it all we can still have everything we have ever dreamed of; and more. She has a Master's in Education.

