

A Letter on Pride Legacy, and What's Ahead



Friends,

It's Pride, y'all, and I am so excited to celebrate (again) our rich and colorful community. This year has been tough, with the loss of some of our most iconic queer changemakers, leaders, and elders who helped build the spaces and movements we inherit today. Their loss reminds me that Pride has always been about more than a month on the calendar.

Rather, it's about people choosing to come together, often in difficult circumstances, smiling and laughing in the face of adversity. Not because it doesn't hurt, but to firmly and loudly say, "You will not break us," (and for me especially) while honoring our history and how far we've come.

As the late and great Beth Marschak—"Momma Beth" to some—once shared with me, many people may not know that Richmond's tradition of celebrating Pride in September has roots in the college students who helped organize some of our community's earliest Pride celebrations. With students often away from campus in June, September offered a time when they could return, gather, organize, and celebrate together. Virginia Pride, in part, continues to honor that history through its annual Pridefest each September.

As we begin a new fiscal year at Side by Side, we do so in a landscape that continues to change around us. Politically, LGBTQ+ young people and their families are navigating increased uncertainty and challenges to their safety and belonging. Fiscally, nonprofits like ours are being asked to respond to growing needs while operating in an increasingly difficult funding environment. Holding on to the lessons history has taught us, we at Side by Side gladly work every day to meet these challenges and show up for our young people because they deserve nothing less.



However, these realities require us to be creative and thoughtful about where we focus our energy and resources. This year, we have committed to **three organizational priorities** that will guide our work:

- **Strengthen Our Foundation & Deepen Our Impact** - We've hired some new folks and are investing in stronger systems, clearer program goals, and better ways to evaluate and demonstrate the difference our work makes. This means ensuring that Side by Side is not only responsive to the needs in front of us today, but positioned to remain strong and sustainable for the years ahead.
- **Meet Youth Where They Are** - The ways young people access community and support are changing. We know that not every young person feels able or ready to walk through our doors, even when they need connection. We are reaching out and reconnecting with schools and spending more time in the community, building partnerships, and creating more opportunities to connect with youth where they already are—while continuing to make Side by Side a place they want and are able to return to.
- **Grow Our Voice & Visibility** - Most importantly, our young people are amazing. We want to create more opportunities for young people to share their own stories, experiences, and perspectives in ways that feel safe and empowering to them, but we also want to share the story of their joy. We are working to be more intentional about telling the story of our impact and the people who make this work possible.

These priorities are not a departure from who we are. They are about ensuring that we continue to evolve alongside the young people and communities we serve. For 35 years, Side by Side has adapted to meet the changing needs of LGBTQ+ youth. This year is another chapter in that work.

There is much ahead of us, and I am excited for you to see these priorities take shape throughout the year. Thank you for continuing to stand Side by Side with LGBTQ+ youth and young adults across Virginia.

Marquis D. Mapp, QMHP-C
Executive Director
Side by Side

