

Throughout PRIDE Month, CTI will be featuring profiles of local LGBTQ+ leaders to celebrate #LowellLGBTQExcellence.

CTI Celebrates Local LGBTQ+ Leaders of Excellence ~ Frannie Collazo

Nominated by Marta Bobinski, Lead Case Manager, Housing, CTI

"My name is Fran *Frannie* Collazo. I am a Photographer, Model and Activist. I have been involved with the LGBTQIAA+ community for nearly half my life. I have been part of protests and marches in the Boston and New York area since I was 17 (I'm now 37).

Pride means a chance for the community to be themselves fully in a world where that's not always seen as okay. It is a chance for the companies and establishments that benefit from our patronage to show us appreciation. Pride is coming together to show others who might not realize we are here. It's the "cookout" that everyone is invited to. If businesses declared themselves *SAFE SPACE* it would do much more to get folks from the community in the building. You have no idea the relief that is seeing that SAFE SPACE sticker on a business door gives people who might not feel safe going out otherwise. Another way the community can support PRIDE is to hire talent that is QUEER, not just during Pride month. Those individuals still have to work and support themselves all year round. Having LGTBQIAA events more regularly will help bring more business to places where the community might not know they are welcome.

I have high hopes for the new generations coming up. They are daring and full of innovative and inspiring ideas. I see how they get excited to support events we "veterans" put together. I think my advice is to take that responsibility seriously. The community WANTS leaders; they crave them. When we see leaders being a voice for us and being able to articulate our needs, it gives us hope. That hope is why we support our leaders. We need more people willing to do the challenging work and be in those rooms where many of us might be uncomfortable speaking. I was fortunate to come up during a time when there were so many great leaders doing great work and moving our visibility forward. A time when people were showing up in person and organizing super-effective demonstrations. A time when demonstrations changed the landscape of the acceptance of the community we see today. Activism is hard work. It is selfless and challenging work and not for the faint of heart. We do work so that the future is more accessible for the people coming up after us. Learn from our elders but also bring your fresh new perspective into it. I think that's how we move forward.

My start in activism came from a very brave ally I had as a teacher in high school. He took my class to our first peaceful protest, which truly sparked something in me. It showed me that there's power in unity, which stuck with me for the rest of my life. A true leader brings people together. A true leader finds the common thread in our humanity.

As a leader in the community, my proudest moments are when I see actual joy in the faces of the people around me. My proudest moments come when I see people being unapologetically themselves. My experiences as a trans woman of color have taught me patience, compassion, and self-love; they are invaluable. It would help if you did this work. The most difficult obstacle I had to overcome to be where I am today was self-doubt. My experience has also made me want to highlight joy and representation, which can be seen in the range of beautiful clients I work with. I get to capture their joy so they can see it forever!

The world will repeatedly try to tell you that you can't do something, but gosh does it feel good when you defy that and experience a breakthrough!"

#LowellLGBTQExcellence #PRIDE #CommunityLeader #Leadership #DEIatCTI #PRIDEMonth2023
#Appreciation #Grateful #LowellLGBTQPlusExcellence