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Stonewall Columbus Celebrates Graduation of Inaugural “Out to Work” – Workforce Development Cohort

Seven graduates complete innovative workforce readiness program designed to support justice-impacted LGBTQ+ residents in Franklin County

COLUMBUS, Ohio, Aug. 19, 2026 — Stonewall Columbus proudly celebrated the graduation of seven participants from the inaugural cohort of its **Out to Work - Workforce Development Program**, a six-week workforce readiness initiative designed to reduce employment barriers and create pathways to economic stability for justice-impacted LGBTQ+ residents in Franklin County.

Made possible through grant funding from the **Franklin County Board of Commissioners**, the program combines hands-on job training with comprehensive support services to help participants build confidence, skills, and professional connections needed for long-term success.

The first cohort completed training from July 13 through August 19, participating in barista instruction, customer service development, financial empowerment workshops, mentorship opportunities, teamwork exercises, and wraparound support services. Participants gained practical experience through the Stonewall Café powered by Queer Beans while building transferable skills applicable to a variety of employment opportunities.

Stonewall Columbus hosted a graduation ceremony recognizing the accomplishments of the seven graduates. The event featured remarks from **Franklin County Administrator Kenneth Wilson**, who congratulated participants on their achievement and highlighted the importance of workforce development initiatives that expand opportunity and promote economic mobility.

Also in attendance were **Deputy County Administrator Damika Withers; Perla Martinez, Deputy Director of the Franklin County Office of Economic Engagement and Community Development**; community partners; and Stonewall Columbus staff, all joining in celebrating the graduates' success.

"Out to Work shows us how interconnected we really are, how depending on each other and our community can help us invest in ourselves, and in turn, show up for each other," said Svetlana Harlan, Executive Operations Manager at Stonewall Columbus.

The program was developed through collaboration with numerous community partners and sponsors whose expertise and support helped make the inaugural cohort possible. Stonewall Columbus extends its gratitude to:

- [ALVIS Inc.](#)
- [Bikes for All People](#)
- [Cameron Mitchell Restaurants](#), ServSafe Certification
- [Central Outreach Wellness Center](#)
- [Columbus Works](#)
- [COTA](#)
- [Equality Ohio](#)
- [Franklin County Office of Economic Engagement and Community Development](#)
- [Franklin County Office of Justice Policy and Programs](#)
- [Freedom Ala Cart](#)
- [KeyBank](#)
- [North Central Mental Health Counseling](#)
- [Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Correction](#)
- [JustLeadership USA](#)
- [Queer Beans](#) & [Little Gay Bookstore](#)
- [Queerencia](#)
- [The Returning Artists Guild](#)

For graduates, the program provided more than workforce training. It offered community, confidence, and a renewed sense of possibility.

"Out to Work made me feel accepted and seen. It made me more aware of my strengths and the direction I want to take my career."

-Wolff, Cohort 1 Graduate

"I've made great contacts through the program. I never thought I would get the hang of being a barista, but I did get it. I feel ready to work."

-Val, Cohort 1 Graduate

"I am now more optimistic about finding a job that suits me personally and finding my place in Columbus."

-Samson, Cohort 1 Graduate

The Out to Work Workforce Development Program reflects Stonewall Columbus' ongoing commitment to advancing economic empowerment and creating supportive pathways for LGBTQ+ community members. Following the success of the inaugural cohort, Stonewall Columbus looks forward to hosting the next two cohorts this year. Cohort 2 runs from September 8 through October 14, with applications due by August 31. Cohort 3 runs from November 2 through December 9, with applications due by October 31. Eligible participants can earn up to \$1,500 in paid training over the course of the six-week program. People interested in the program should visit <https://stonewallcolumbus.org/out-to-work-inquiry/> to learn more and submit an application.

About Stonewall Columbus

Stonewall Columbus is Central Ohio's leading LGBTQ+ community organization, serving as a hub for community connection, advocacy, education, and celebration. For more than 45 years, Stonewall Columbus has worked to increase visibility, inclusion, and support for LGBTQ+ individuals and families throughout the region.