2023
IMPACT REPORT

LOVE IS

love

An evening of self-expression, hope and love.

UnityPoint Health
Meriter Foundation

UWHealth
Thank you for supporting LGBTQ+ youth in our community by being a part of Love is Love 2023. Your involvement directly supports a safe, supportive, accepting and non-judgmental environment at Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (CAP) at UnityPoint Health – Meriter, where kids are free to be themselves; where they are seen for the beautiful, incredible young humans they are; where they can heal and learn skills to cope with challenges they may be experiencing.

Kids in our community—of every identity, background and lived experience—deserve access to compassionate and supportive care. That is truly what Love is Love is about.

Thank you for opening your hearts. Your generosity is helping change lives and save lives.

Sincerely,

Katie Schmitt, MD
Medical Director, UnityPoint Health – Meriter
Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

On February 3, 2023, you showed up to support LGBTQ+ youth in a BIG way! 669 tickets sold $321,756 (donations raised)

Increased access to mental health care for kids in our community
At times, over 50% of CAP patients identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community, including those who are working to understand their sexual identity and/or use nonbinary pronouns (such as they/them). You’ve eliminated barriers and helped them reach a safe space by providing transportation vouchers.

Expanded resources for patients
Your gift purchased gender-affirming resources like chest binders, TransTape, pronoun pins, clothing, patient resource kits and books that convey a powerful message of support and acceptance to our patients.

Provided advanced training for healthcare workers
Every team member at CAP must complete a training course with the verbiage, clinical tools and strategies to effectively support our LGBTQ+ patients.

Hired additional caregivers
Behavioral health therapists who specialize in LGBTQ+ affirming care recently joined the CAP team to lead weekly group sessions where LGBTQ+ patients can openly discuss their experiences, challenges and concerns, fostering a sense of belonging and community to help them on their healing journey.
The night began with the smooth vocals of Marc Lopez followed by a friendly welcome from our energetic emcees, Baltazar De Anda Santana, Executive Director of the Latino Academy of Workforce Development, and Abby Swetz, Communications Director at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

We listened as Katie Schmitt, MD shared the realities of the mental health struggles our LGBTQ+ youths are facing before being filled with hope as Damian Bock shared his inspirational story.

“Just after the pandemic... we all had to go back to school. My anxiety and depression related to gender dysphoria started to get out of control... By the spring of 2021, I was suicidal and ended up in UnityPoint Health - Meriter’s Emergency Department for intervention. I felt totally buried and hopeless."

When you’re dealing with queer issues it can feel isolating and like no one else will understand. A community is better than just one person alone, and CAP at Meriter provided a community for me. They provided it at a time I really needed it. It’s also amazing to be standing here, in front of all of you, knowing this is my community too. Thank you for being here tonight and supporting kids like me.

Damian Bock
Excerpt from Love is Love 2023 speech
Guests danced the night away thanks to the musical stylings of DJ Christopher Vasquez.

Our Love is Love event co-founders, John Sims (Chair) and Tina Noel, thanked attendees and sponsors for their incredible, life-saving support.

The evening concluded with a dazzling drag show by Bianca Lynn Breeze, Nia Chanel Sadora Sanchez, Nemo and Wynter da Bratt.

Meaningful moments throughout the evening were captured by Melanie Renee Photography.

To view the full photo gallery, visit bit.ly/lil2023photos

“I never had the support I needed when I was a gay youth. Fortunately, I had a family who supported me when I came out later in life. If I had the resources we present to youth today, I think my life would be a bit different. When I was asked to help create a small piece of this event, I knew I needed to give back and help with such a great cause.”

Bianca Lynn Breeze
Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway declared February 3, 2023 as **Love is Love Day**

“*We are better people and a stronger community when all people are given the opportunity to live their lives as their true selves*”

“*We* are committed to improving the lives of LGBTQ+ youth through compassionate, sexuality- and gender-affirming mental health care”

“Our youth are charting a new and exciting course, pushing the boundaries of how we think about and understand gender and sexuality”

**Love is Love 2025**

*Saturday, February 15th, 2025*

Overture Center for the Arts

**SAVE THE DATE**

Scan for more information:
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PLANNING COMMITTEE:
- Diego Campoverde, Adam Erdmann, Nancy Francisco-Welke, Gabe Javier, Valerie Kazamias, Marcos Lozano, Tina Noel, Darcy Pinasco, Katie Schmitt, MD, John Sims (Chair)