

ALPHA MULUGETA

How has this person provided service to the LGBTQ community?

Our person of the week is RCC's Director of Community Mental Health Alpha Mulugeta, MSW. Alpha has worked at the RCC since October of 2009. He coordinates the Center's social and support groups. Alpha's position is 100% funded by the Contra Costa County Division of Mental Health through the Mental Health Service Act (MHSA). Alpha's program is designed to help promote social support and social connections among the LGBTQ community. He recruits, trains and provides support to all of the RCC's volunteer facilitators. Alpha also facilitates the Center's HIV positive support group and the Men's Discussion group. Alpha also served as the first coordinator of RCC's counseling program (now managed by our Clinical Director, Paula Howells, LMFT). It is due to Alpha's dedicated work that Rainbow Counseling Services grew into a stand-alone program.

Alpha was involved in providing service to the LGBTQ community long before being hired at the RCC. Alpha says he first began his LGBTQ activities while pursuing an undergraduate degree in Psychology at the University of Southern California. During his junior year, he was hired as the Resident Advisor for the Rainbow Floor—the campus's LGBTQ dorm—and jokingly claims that they hired him because “I was the gayest one.” Concurrently, Alpha became involved with the campus's LGBT student organization the GLBTA, and also began work as the Communications Director for the campus' LGBTQ center. Additionally, during his time at USC, Alpha became a recruiter and interviewer with the Virtual Sex Project—a research study and HIV-prevention program targeting MSM's. After graduating from USC, Alpha made a conscious choice to embark on a career path that would allow him to continue to work on behalf of the LGBTQ community, claiming that, “I kept doing it because I like working with LGBTQ people, and I also think there is a real need for LGBTQ-specific services.”

Later, while pursuing an MSW at UC Berkeley, Alpha began to work as the Themed Program Advisor for Berkeley's Unity House Program—a residential learning community for LGBTQ people and their allies. During his second year of study, Alpha also completed an internship at Lavender Seniors of the East Bay.

Background:

Alpha was born and raised in San Francisco in a devout Catholic family. His parents received political asylum due to political tumult in Ethiopia.

Alpha's earliest gay memories: “My earliest queer memory goes back to when I was in pre-school. I remember that I was with a group of boys and we were all looking through a Cinderella picture book. We were looking at the ballroom scene specifically, and all the boys were choosing girls in the picture that they would marry. Before I knew what I was doing, I blurted out that I wanted to marry the prince! Of course as soon as I said the

words, I wanted to take them back. I felt a strong feeling of shame and regret, and my skin began to burn even before I heard the other boys' reactions to my words, "Ew, that's gross! You're a boy, you're supposed to marry a girl. You're weird..." Even though my difference was a concern to me while I was growing up, I always thought that it was an issue that would resolve itself later. I always thought, one day I will make a decision and I will stop feeling this way... Needless to say, that day never came."

Another side of Alpha's personality is his work as a local performer. Alpha claims that he has always been a performer, but he started doing it in a concerted manner in 2nd grade when he was allowed to join his school's chorus. As he got older, Alpha moved on to do plays and took up an interest in dance and musical theatre finally minoring in Musical Theater at USC. He continues to perform in the San Francisco cabaret scene and just finished a recent stint at the New Conservatory Theater Center in the production *Dirty Little Show Tunes*, which received rave reviews.

Alpha states that it is an interesting experience working with the queer community as a person of color and shares that "The LGBTQ community definitely feels like home to me. My experience as a queer person, a person of color and a first generation American all help me to see that there are a lot of different ways to belong... and also to be an outsider. There are times I feel like I belong and other times when it can feel like I am on the outside looking in. That is why in my work I try to use my own personal experiences to help people relate to one another other with more understanding and compassion."

Three words that describe ALPHA: Talented, Dedicated, Multi-faceted



(Photo: Alpha Mulugeta)