



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Emma Neville, Community Health Worker  
chw@shenlgbtqcenter.org

## **Shenandoah LGBTQ Center launches Community Health Worker program**

**(Staunton, Va.)** — Through generous support from an Augusta Health Foundation grant, the Shenandoah LGBTQ Center has launched a landmark program aimed at improving health outcomes for the local LGBTQ+ population. Emma Neville, MSPH has been hired as the Center's Community Health Worker and will lead the program in providing health care navigation, health education and goal setting to improve coordination and access to care for our LGBTQ+ community.

Why is this program critical in this area? Recent large-scale studies and surveys of the Southern LGBTQ+ population consistently cite health inequities and significant barriers to accessing affirming care. Within the LGBTQ community, transgender/non-binary, BIPOC, and individuals with lower incomes report even higher rates of disparities. These disparities have been connected to lowered health outcomes including higher rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, substance misuse, and experiences of physical violence. LGBTQ+ members are also more likely to delay care due to cost or fear of discrimination and are less likely to pursue preventative care.

The Community Health Worker (CHW) will work alongside members of the LGBTQ+ community to identify their health-related goals and connect them with health system and community-based resources. In addition to providing direct client support for connection to services such as STI testing and prevention, mental health supports, and gender-affirming care, the Community Health Worker will serve as liaison and advocate for a safe and inclusive experience for LGBTQ+ patients. The program hopes to fully assess the landscape of LGBTQ+ affirming medical and mental health providers in the Valley and develop a comprehensive database and referral network.

Emma joins the staff at the Shenandoah LGBTQ Center with an extensive background in health education, community engagement and organizing, and a career dedicated to serving vulnerable populations. "I'm so excited to be joining the Shenandoah LGBTQ Center team to help build a healthier, happier, better supported LGBTQ+ community here in the Valley. So many LGBTQ+ folks in this community either travel to more urban areas to receive healthcare or are not receiving any at all. My hope is that through this work, we can begin to develop a strong network of competent, affirming, and equitable healthcare providers in the area to elevate the health and wellness of the entire community and stop sending the message that affirmation, care, and support can only be found elsewhere."

The Community Health Worker program is open for external referrals. If you are a member of the LGBTQ+ community hoping to seek resources, health education or to get connected to care, please reach out to Emma by booking a confidential appointment on our website (<https://www.shenlgbtqcenter.org/book-online>), or reach out with questions via email ([chw@shenlgbtqcenter.org](mailto:chw@shenlgbtqcenter.org)). The Shenandoah LGBTQ Center also encourages healthcare providers or any community organization serving the LGBTQ+ community directly to reach out to learn more about the program and how to become a part of our referral database and network. Please visit the CHW program page, (<https://www.shenlgbtqcenter.org/community-health-worker>), to complete a provider interest form, book an appointment, and find updates as the program continues to develop.

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