Feb 28, 2013

Stephen Quirke: Alright, this interview is being conducted by Stephen Quirke and Natasha Lipai. We are here at the office of Basic Rights Oregon in Portland to talk to Khalil Edwards, the Coordinator of PFLAG Portland’s Black Chapter. He is also the Racial Justice and Alliance Building Organizer for Basic Rights Oregon. Today’s date is February 27, [2013], and if everybody’s ready I’ll start with an easy question, which is, how did you get involved with PFLAG?

Khalil Edwards: That’s not an easy question. No, that is a pretty easy question. So my mom Antoinette Edwards is the Co-Founder of PFLAG Portland Black Chapter, so I kind of got involved by a proxy but… So they started out with an event that they did. It was like a family day out that they had at the Red Cross, and my mom have told me about it, and that was like my first introduction to the Black Chapter of PFLAG. I came to that and I brought some other folks and it was a really nice event and it was just you know, folks talking and sharing and celebrating each other. And after that, I wasn’t very involved, but then I became, then I started going. I can’t remember how it happened, but I started going to the monthly meetings and being more involved, and through that I started taking on like more and more responsibility. And there was another coordinator before me, but I was kind of acting as a co-coordinator. I was doing a lot of you know, a lot of the program stuff and really stepping up and taking the lead volunteer role. And so that coordinator end up stepping down and wasn’t able to do the job anymore and they just kind of said you know, they were like, “You are the coordinator now.” and I was like, “Oh, okay.” And they were like, “You are not going to say no, are you?” and I was like, “Sure I am not.” And they were like, “You have been doing it for the past few months anyway, so you might as well just take an official position.” and that’s basically how it happened.

Natasha Lipai: So you and your mother co-founded the Black Chapter, correct?

Khalil Edwards: She did. I didn’t. She co-founded it with someone named Kerry Johnson.
Natasha Lipai: Okay. So what exactly… What kind of needs… I guess why did a Black Chapter… What kind of needs are specific to the black community and do any reactions kind of standout in your memory of the formation of the Black Chapter of PFLAG and how large is it?

Khalil Edwards: So the Black Chapter kind of came about and I don’t have the best details around this club. I wasn’t really around when this happened, but the leadership—Dawn Holt is the President of PFLAG Portland and was the president at the inception of the Portland Black Chapter and has been a huge support of this chapter. So Dawn Holt and Terry Noble, who was actually the PFLAG Oregon Council State Oregon Council member or whatever, really started having conversations about how they were not reaching all the communities within the Portland metro area as PFLAG Portland was working to do and trying to do, and they realized that it wasn’t enough that, you know, to just say like, “We welcome everyone,” and you know, it takes more than that a lot of times. And so they really became intentional about like what are we doing wrong, what are we not doing, what do we need to do, how we overcome these challenges, these barriers, what should be done, so they reached, they really did work to like outreach the folks in the community and through that outreach, they connected with my mom and she had done community work ever since I have known her or you know, so ever since I can remember. And so she was one of the people they reached out to and also Kerry Johnson who is the co-founder and you know, they started having those conversations with them about you know, what needs to happen and from that arose the fact that there needed to be a culturally relevant and specific chapter of PFLAG and to really deal with the unique experiences and challenges, and that African-American LGBT folks space and you know, folks in the African-American community enlarged whether they are straight or LGBT and how you know, because that is kind of the model of PFLAG bringing both of those groups together to discuss things and move the mission towards a healthy community and an accepting community, so that was kind of how it rose out of that. One of the things that – so there are, more than, there are several unique issues and experiences that African–American lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender folks face, but one of the initial things that arose when they were creating the Black Chapter and recognized the need for having that culturally relevant space and that space that could meet the needs of the community that it
was trying to serve was that the double discrimination that a lot of LGBT African-Americans have to deal with and I kind of used the story or analogy or whatever, but the fact that you know, a lot of times if you are a black kid and you are going to school and you are being outcast or pushed out or ostracized or treated differently or you know harassed or discriminated against because of your skin color, you can usually go home and get support around that, and you know your parents or your family at home or your home life will tell you that… Can you pause it? Sorry.

**Stephen Quirke:** Wait, wait, wait. Okay, go.

**Khalil Edwards:** A lot of times they can go home to their home life or their family and get support around you know, you have a strong or rich heritage, or you know, you’re surrounded by the folks that are the same as you, that look like you. That you know you are valued and you know and they can give you that armor to go back to that school or they can go battle for you and you have like these soldiers or this family unit that’s there to support you around that and they are like, “How you are treating my kid is not okay,” or whatever, whatever. But a lot of times if you are pushed out or being treated that way because of your skin color and also because of your sexual orientation, the school is not a welcoming place for you and the home is not necessarily a welcoming place for you, and so you have both of these things that are like that cause or multiply or affect what you are dealing with and that in turn you know, creates different issues in your life and different challenges and problems that folks have to deal with because of that double discrimination that they often feel. And even if they do have that acceptance at home and if they are getting some support at home, you know, a lot of times that next support can look a lot of different ways, but at the same time even if you’re having these two different identities being challenged and dismissed at your school or in your life or in your world you know, it can create lots of problems for folks so…

**Stephen Quirke:** True. So just to go back a little bit, you mentioned that your mom did a lot of fundraising before PFLAG. Is that right?

**Khalil Edwards:** A lot of community work?
Stephen Quirke: Yeah, the community work with it.

Khalil Edwards: Yeah.

Stephen Quirke: Can we go back and maybe start a little further back and go talk about what it was like growing up? I mean, she sounds like an amazing woman. You are from Portland, right?

Khalil Edwards: I’m born and raised in Portland and she is an amazing woman. And just to start right here by the way, he was just dropping the pictures from our 4 year anniversary and he took a great picture of her at the celebration and they will put it on the CD cover.

Stephen Quirke: That’s cool.

Khalil Edwards: Yeah, she is an amazing woman. My dad is an amazing guy, an amazing man, and they both just have this instilled in me like they have this social justice mind frame or whatever, and framework that the way that they you know, live and view the world and the way they operate in the world, and so that was just passed down to us. They have been very prominent folks in the community and very active in the community. My mom, she has an education background, but she has done a lots of different community work around specially working with youth. Everybody calls her mom and everybody knows you know, like you know we have to always share her ever since we were little and we have tons of youth that stayed with us over the years you know that she was supporting and helping, and sometimes folks you know, they needed that space to stay in. And so like a lot of times she was just bringing kids in and helping them out in those ways. She has started the first GSA at Jefferson High School when she was working there in the Family Resource, or, Family Resource Coordinator position, or something like that, but that was several years ago so, and this was before I even had came out to my family, so they have been strong supporters of just human rights and social justice, from day one. My dad, this was when I was living in California, I had to came out by this time and this was when I was living in California, and when they were out here like canvassing, I think it was Measure 9 during that time at around
2004 and they were out here canvassing and talking to folks in the community to make sure they voted the right way on that measure you know, and I was like, well, it doesn’t really affected me. I don’t have any plans to move back here you know, but they were doing it not necessarily because of who I was, but because you know this is an issue that they cared about and they you know, they felt it was important to be involved in that way.

Stephen Quirke: Right. So this is after you came out?

Khalil Edwards: This is after I came out, yeah, but I was living in California. You know, so it was like it didn’t really… It wouldn’t really have an impact. If it passed or it failed, it wouldn’t necessarily have a huge impact on my life.

Stephen Quirke: Sure. You didn’t plan to come back to Portland?

Khalil Edwards: Yeah, I had no plan on coming back to, no. It was kind of a fluke when I ended up coming back to Oregon. Another thing my dad did, he was the business manager of Local Union 48 Electrical, for the head of electrical workers and as a business manager, he changed the policy to where same sex partners could access the same health benefits and the same like…

Stephen Quirke: Excellent.

Khalil Edwards: And so just like things like that, but not just around sexual orientations stuff and just around things, human rights and social justice issues. It wouldn’t matter what you know, what group that that impacts or is affecting. So yeah, they have done tons of stuff forever. You know, they always have been involved.

Stephen Quirke: Right.
Natasha Lipai: You recently worked on a study of black individuals in the LGBT community called Lift Every Voice. What were some of the findings in this report and was any of it surprising to you?

Khalil Edwards: Some of it was surprising. I mean, I know that, I already knew that LGBT African-Americans are a very marginalized group and experience disparities at a higher level than their counterparts, whether that’s other ethnic or rather race or ethnic groups or whether that’s heterosexual you know, folks that are you know, opposite sex families and you know, whoever it maybe. So I came into it knowing that, but it was needed to have the data to really lift up those voices and to lift up those experiences on some of the disparities and really highlight to those disparities, but it was… I think one of the most surprising things to me that came out of it was the fact that I think there was like 44% of respondents reported living on an income of $20,000 or less and that was pretty surprising to me that so many folks that responded to our survey, which was also in the same level with national data that we compared it to, but, so that was somewhat surprising. And also the fact that there was very little data appeared around the transgender community, the black transgender African-American transgender community, so it just really hit home the fact that, you know, this is a community within a community that is being very much underrepresented. And their story’s not necessarily being told because it is not the data there. And why is the data not there? Because they are so marginalized and experiences even, even higher disparities than lesbian, gay, bisexual folks, so that was probably surprising too. But you know a lot of the information that came out of that report, I don’t think it was so much surprising as it was just interesting to… especially doing the focus groups and to really kind of look at the data and putting the data together with the discussions that we had when we did focus groups and some of the feedback we got from folks while you know, conducting the surveys and when doing the focus groups and just to let folks know that like what is happening to you and who you are and what your experience is, is important and valid. And so I think that was interesting that folks really needed to have that voice and it was good to give them that voice even if they say like you know, “Shit is fucked up,” or whatever, but at least to say like the fact that shit is fucked up for me it’s not irrelevant. It’s relevant you know, so –
Natasha Lipai: Could you tell us more about these focus groups? Did these happen after or before the study?

Khalil Edwards: That happened during the study. So we wanted to do focus groups to support the data that we wanted to have you know, like storytelling and anecdotal information to support the actual numbers that we comprised from you know, analyzing the information from the surveys we conducted.

Natasha Lipai: Okay.

Khalil Edwards: We had two focus groups and they were… yeah, there were two focus groups with African-American folks. And both focus groups we had a majority of folks that identifies as LGBT and we had a couple of folks that are identified as allies.

Natasha Lipai: Nice. Portland has the first Black PFLAG Chapter, or African-American. How do you feel about that? Is that kind of surprising or –

Khalil Edwards: It was surprising, yeah. Yeah, it was pretty surprising because you know Portland has a very small community of African-Americans of any you know, people of color in general. And so it was surprising that in other cities or states they have a much larger African-American population or that they wouldn’t have that kind of, that they wouldn’t have a similar model to us and already have created that space. You know I know that in New York they have a… PFLAG Chapter that’s for people of color, so it is kind of like the different ethnic groups in the different communities are coming together, so it is a similar model but it is not you know one African-American specific. It is not just specific to African-Americans. And then I kind of thought like well, maybe in these other communities they have you know, other things that are comparable, and so maybe that is the reason why so – and I’m not really sure best to answering that, but when after doing the work that we have been doing and folks are, it has been noted and folks are hearing about it, and learning about some of the amazing things that we’ve done in a short time that we have been around and folks have reached out to us and saying, “We want to also do you know, a Black Chapter, an African-
American chapter in our community. Can you support us in doing that?” So you know that kind of tells me like even if they’re… That is one thing, there wasn’t necessarily something comparable because you are looking to start something you know, comparable in your own community, so that is surprising. Folks from Chicago, LA, and Birmingham have reached out to us to support them in trying to you know replicate what we’ve been able to do here and you know, I would think that was something that would be happening already. But I think it is also partly the model that we have for PFLAG and how it is a little different than the regular model for PFLAG as well.

**Stephen Quirke:** What brought you back to Portland from California?

**Khalil Edwards:** Well… (laughter)

**Stephen Quirke:** Is that personal?

**Khalil Edwards:** A break up.

**Natasha Lipai:** What other communities reached out to you? Like you said Birmingham and New York City and who else? Have there been any other cities?

**Khalil Edwards:** No. Yeah, just those three, Chicago, LA, Birmingham, and then PFLAG National has reached out to really try to get more information about the work we’re doing and to look into you know, trying to share that information nationally with folks, so folks can get a better understanding of some of the work we’ve been doing and the information can get out there on a more widespread basis instead of looking at like individual you know PFLAGs. It can be an essential place. Yeah, but those are folks that we’ve heard from.

**Natasha Lipai:** What kind of work or what memories, in general, from working with PFLAG are you most proud of or do any stand out, in general?
Khalil Edwards Interview

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Stephen Quirke & Natasha Lipai

Khalil Edwards: Yeah. I mean, a few stand out. I think there’s been some really memorable events and we do this thing called Mother Saturday. We do an event called Mother Saturday that we’ve been doing. This year would be the fourth year I think we did it, that we would have done it, third for fourth year. I think we did it the first time in 2010 because that’s when I became the coordinator. It was actually in the, like the January I think of 2010 or something like that where I officially like became the coordinator. So we do this thing called Mother Saturday and basically the idea is that it’s around Mother’s Day, but it is not necessarily about mothers. It is more about bringing in people who have supported you and cared for you and have been there for you and just showing them thank you. You know, giving them a thank you for being that, and so it’s a very special event and it kind of changes each year. And it is kind of really organic and it ends up being what it needs to be at the time, but no matter what the outcome is or how the program goes or what you know, how the agenda ends, ends our rolling out, it’s always people are always very moved and there is lots of tears each time. So I think that’s one that stands out for me and probably why it stands out is because you know, we make a plan for it, but it ends up just being what it needs to be. So you know we give a space and we give the food and you know we have a very small agenda, and then it ends up just turning into, like one year we had each person go around and kind of say something about you know, the person that they brought, and like say a thank you to them.

Another year, we did something similar, but folks just started telling very touching stories about you know, their journey or the journey that they had with people in their life, and so and that was also the, one of those times was when someone that comes to our meetings, which is another very memorable moment. She lives in Forest Grove and she has been a part of the PFLAG Forest Grove chapter, but she found out about us and comes all the way from Forest Grove to almost all of our events, to each of our monthly socials and meetings. And she does that because you know she feels welcome you know, in the space that we provided and she shared that at one of those Mother’s Day events and just shared how you know, how good it felt, how special it felt, to be a part of this chapter, so that is another memorable moment right there.
I think another one is the fact that Portland Black Pride, we started sponsoring Portland Black Pride in 2011, and so it is now housed under PFLAG Portland Black Chapter. I think in 2009 or 2010 it kind of fizzled out and not much was happening around it, the organization that it used to be housed under dissolved in 2008. And so when I became the coordinator I was like this is Portland Black Pride, it is a tradition that we need to have in this community. We need to make sure it’s thriving in there and this needs to be one of our priorities to support that. And so we started doing that in 2011 and our signature event that we have had for the past two years I mean because events kind of change in 2011 to 2012. The events have changed somewhat from each, the events that we will do throughout the week, but we did the Families of Color Day Out and it is a day in the park with family and friends and kids and we play kickball. Last year, we played kickball, and the year before that we had like the performances and stuff, but it’s a really nice event and people always appreciate and really enjoy that event a lot and appreciate having that event. And so it is just a time for the folks to just come out and celebrate with each other and have fun in the park and be you know, you have a wide range of folks as far as ages, sexual orientation, you know families, single folks, you know, it is all those people coming together, straight folks, allies. You know, so it’s a really nice, so that is another highlight I think that stands out. Yeah, I could go on.

**Stephen Quirke:** Please, by all means… We have other questions, but go ahead.

**Khalil Edwards:** Yeah, I was trying to think. Something that happened and it slipped my mind, so I will come back to it when it comes back to me.

**Stephen Quirke:** Would you like to talk a little bit about the Our Family projects that you’ve dealt with?

**Khalil Edwards:** Yeah, yeah, definitely. So Our Family started as this standing together project and basically standing together was a leadership project to bring LGBT, people of color, and straight allies of color together to build, to do skills, training, and analysis building around issues within our community and around the queer and trans people of color, within our community and other communities. And so it was a one year long cohort of folks that
went through all these skill building, analysis building and training, and stuff. And then out of that you know, some goals were identified and some long-term goals or some short-term goals and we all came together. So, I was a part of that and that’s how I got involved with Our Families. And we identified that we wanted to do Our Families and we went to the education campaign and we would call it Our Families and the focus of this education campaign would be to build, to centralize the leadership of LGBT people of color in our community, build community amongst LGBT people of color in our community, and to reach out to straight communities of color to build acceptance within those communities and educate them about our issues, so those are kind of the main priorities that the education campaign focused on.

And to achieve that, we created videos called the Our Families Video Series and it was videos highlighting the trials and triumphs and experiences of LGBT families of color or LGBT people of color and we had, we created three specific communities, specific videos for African-American, Latino and Asian and Pacific Islander. And so, through that program I was in part of that program and then it became to campaign and shifted to Our Families from Standing Together, Our Families, and through that there was a temporary position that opened up here. You know they kind of reached out to folks within Our Families and you know, I was interviewed and selected. I applied and I was interviewed and selected and that turned into a full-time position after that. And also, so there’s three staff or people in the racial justice program and two of them are from the Our Families cohort. It’s really a testament to the fact that you know, it’s an LGBT leadership program, LGBT people of color leadership program that’s varied through those names and the fact that is like building folks up to become leaders. And you know those are the same folks that have been moved up into the organization to be like actual staff members.

But the Our Families… there’s lots of things that the program does, but I think what is really exciting about it is that it’s led by the cohort, the volunteers, and the leaders that are within the program. So they make the decisions, they decide what direction they’re going to go in. They decide like how or what needs to be done on our community and how we are going to get there, so it was the Our Families Group that identified and came up with the goals and
you know, what they want or what the needs are of the community and what kind of community they want to see and shape and form and how those are going to happen, and you know identified all those different goals around that. And they’re the ones that make those decisions of you know, what is going to happen like let’s make these videos. Recently the cohort came together and decided to do, make a shift after doing a two-year education campaign and to shift towards doing policy and advocacy work and so you know, they came together and made that decision to make that shift and to you know, achieve the different goals that have been outlined by doing advocacy work for the community.

**Stephen Quirke**: Right.

**Natasha Lipai**: Let’s move on and talk about Basic Rights Oregon. Could you tell me more about your work with Basic Rights Oregon?

**Khalil Edwards**: So Basic Rights Oregon of course is the nonprofit LGBT policy and advocacy organization that works to achieve LGBT rights for Oregon, for the community. We’re operated out of three main programs. There is the Marriage Program which is working to achieve the freedom to marry for all our Oregonians. We’ll be going to the ballot in 2014 to achieve that and there has been lots of work leading up to that to achieve that, with different measures across and different policies across the years including the domestic partnership that was passed, and doing a lot of support, and on-the-ground work in Washington, and doing a lot of work in community here to really change the hearts and minds of people one by one to support the freedom to marry. And then there’s the Trans Justice Program, which has done some incredible work and is continuing to do incredible work to have trans-inclusive health care for transgender Oregonians and for all Oregonians, including transgender Oregonians, and they have made a lot of progress in achieving that and they have, they just recently, so they’ve had lots of wins along the way with the City of Portland employees and you know other businesses and groups across the state. And they just had a huge win recently to where all private, our private… What is it called, medical plans on private?
Natasha Lipai: Insurance?

Khalil Edwards: Yeah, in private medical insurance in Oregon. That was like totally freezing from me. But yeah, they are all inclusive now, I think, with Keizer, Legacy and Providence, and all those folks. So the next day just to focus on public insurance, so like Oregon Health Plan and Medicaid and things like that. So they are working to do that currently and the racial justice program, which—the official title is Racial Justice & Alliance Building Program—is where the Our Families work lives, and also a lot of the alliance building work that we do with Racial Justice Partners and Partner Organizations across the state. And most of my works lives in the Our Families piece of the work and some of my work is around doing alliance building work, but it’s really you know, some of the ways that we’re doing that, so we are doing the Our Families work and working with those leaders to support them in carrying out the goals that have been outlined and now we’ve made the shift to advocacy work. And a lot of the work that I am doing around that is really base building and trying to build our base of LGBT people of color in the community that can help move the mission forward and can help move policy and advocacy, advocacy work that we are supporting and that we’re doing in the community. And also to build up that community of folks to where there is a vibrant community of LGBT people of color that feel like there is a space for them in this community and that there is a welcoming atmosphere for folks to really celebrate each other and feel valued in that, and so that is a lot of work I do. I also do a lot of work with the – so we had a part of the strategy campaign was the Our Families statement of support. We reached out to straight leaders of color within the community to sign onto a statement of support, saying, “We support all families, including LGBT families of color,” and that was published in different ethnic media outlets, The Scanner, the Portland Tribune, The Asian Reporter, Hispanic News, and the Umatilla Journal. We also recently created a video around native families and native communities. And I also do a lot of work with reaching out to those leaders to not only sign onto the statement, but also build that relationship with folks and support them in doing work within the different organizations or groups that they represent in the community to be more open and affirming and accepting.

Natasha Lipai: So… Go ahead.
Stephen Quirke: I think we are probably leading towards the same thing. But you have mentioned the previous ballots and things that you have been involved in. What are your memories of Ballot Measure 9 and were you personally involved in that campaign, even though your mom was, but were you?

Khalil Edwards: I wasn’t. I mean, I just remember it kind of vaguely that you know, that it was a hard ballot fight here in the state. I was in California at the time, so I just kind of remember vaguely just talking up here and hearing about it from folks and mainly the people I talked to was my parents about it, so I didn’t hear it. Yeah, I didn’t really remember much about it.

Natasha Lipai: So if the vote in 2014 on marriage equality is successful, you mentioned trans in health insurance, transgender individuals sorry. Health insurance and you know, equal access to health care. What are some other big projects that Basic Rights Oregon is hoping to pursue? Like is there kind of a, I don’t want to say like a linear order or hierarchy, but...what is the next big thing, I guess? And do you personally have any ideas for future campaigns that haven’t received as much press as marriage?

Khalil Edwards: Well, I think that you know marriage is kind of like the big issue that gets lots of press you know, no matter if that’s the main focus or not. I think here at Basic Rights Oregon you know that is just one of the priorities that we’re working on. And you know, including the work and the three different programs, and so I think that after the marriage ballot is won in 2014, I think there’s still going to be work to do around that issue especially depending on you know, implementing what happens with the Defense of Marriage Act, and well that lands with the Supreme Court and other you know, and just making sure that the freedom to marry is providing the most support for families and the most equality for families and equity for families that it can. And I think that so far, we have a strategic plan that we review every few years, and so that really kind of helps to refocus like where we’re at and where we’re going. And so you know that process keeps us grounded and you know, figuring out like, what, where we want to go, and how we are going to get there, but you know I think
there are many issues that affect all of our communities. So I think there is lots of directions we can go in, but I would be very excited to see work being done around the economic equity, economic justice that I think is a huge issue for all of our communities, and especially LGBT communities. And so I would be really excited to work on some things that really supported that and I think that there are some things that we do that do support that, but you know it would be great to work even more on that issue, so that would be exciting. What else? I think that –

Natasha Lipai: Adoption comes to mind for gay families…


Natasha Lipai: Is there anything being done towards that, or…?

Khalil Edwards: You know I am not really sure. I think I have heard some things, but I’m not closely in the loop with that, but I know that there is some work being done around that or I don’t know. If it’s necessarily being led by us or if it’s being led by partners that we work with, but another issue I think that presents some opportunities is the issue around the Industrial Prison Complex and just to wait that impact so many families across the country, but here in the state as well. And so I would love to be a part of work that was trying to do something about that issue and make some changes around that.

Stephen Quirke: Can you expand on that issue a little bit and just tell us a bit more about what is involved in it?

Khalil Edwards: Just the fact that they, you know, these prisons are for profit and you know, they are locking up people of color at alarming rates. The injustice, within the justice system around sentencing or mandatory sentencing that has happened that should be you know, done away with, and really a lot of times when folks go into that systems it is very hard to get out of it. So folks are being locked up for you know, different communities are being locked up for and not being treated fairly around the laws that are on the books around different issues
and around different crimes that are seen as you know, have harsher sentencing than other crimes that are impacting certain groups in a really alarming rate. And then a lot of times when folks get out of serving their sentencing, you know, they are reduced to like a third class citizenship and so they really have very few rights, very few resources, very limited access, and so it really pushes them to either go back into the system or to, you know, …not being able to have a successful life and be able to contribute to society in any kind of way, to be able to support their family and have a family. You know and so it just, it creates a cycle for folks in that, folks are become trapped in and the worst part about it is that it could look a very different way if we really value folks’ lives and try to have a system that was much more equitable and much more supporting. You know education and families and the communities instead of supporting folks that are just trying to make money off of how many people they can lock up.

Stephen Quirke: Right. That is a great initiative. Anything else?

Natasha Lipai: You studied, you have your masters in teaching, is that correct?

Khalil Edwards: Education.

Natasha Lipai: Education. Have you taught since then? Like has that –

Khalil Edwards: Since I got my masters?

Natasha Lipai: Yeah.

Khalil Edwards: Oh, yeah. That is why I moved to California. So I graduated from Portland State University, from the graduate school and got my Master’s in Education from the Graduate Teacher Education Program and applied to teach in Portland and Seattle and LA, and San Bernardino. I think maybe Atlanta too. And so I ended up landing in San Bernardino and moved out there and taught for three years and then moved back.
Natasha Lipai: What subject did you focus on?

Khalil Edwards: I taught English and I was licensed in Language Arts and Social Studies, and so I taught 7th grade language arts and I taught 10th grade English after that for two years. I did 7th grade for one year and then 10th grade.

Natasha Lipai: Okay. Were you involved with gay rights during your teaching years or –

Khalil Edwards: No, not really.

Natasha Lipai: Not really, okay.

Khalil Edwards: No.

Stephen Quirke: So who influenced you the most when you did start getting involved?

Khalil Edwards: …That’s kind of hard question. I mean, I think that I would say probably my best-friend who has did this work for many years and had tried to get me involved before I moved, and you know I kind of got involved like here and there and wasn’t really, really it wasn’t a really big priority like in my world at that time. And so after I moved back, we both, I applied to teach here and my paperwork took forever and I was also applying for other jobs. One of them was to work at Brother to Brother, which became Unity Project of Oregon, which was the nonprofit black LGBT organization within the community here within Portland, and I started working with them and doing, you know, I was the Program Director, so I was doing lots of different things. Most of my job kind of focus on doing prevention work around HIV, STDs, and stuff, but I did other programmatic work too. So and then I think from there you know, that became my focus, and so I just have been focused on it basically ever since then. So I think that I was influenced from a lot of different people. I mean, I think that definitely my parents, my mentor, and one of my best-friends who I mentioned, but I think that I knew that I would be doing something to, it was kind of instilled in me to do work that like served others and to provide that you know community service, in
some type of way. So I think that it just naturally kind of led from like a school educator to doing just like community advocacy work and working within the LGBT movement and within the LGBT realm of work so –

**Natasha Lipai:** Would you ever go back to teaching or working in a school setting and would you try to advocate for gay rights issues if you did return to that?

**Khalil Edwards:** I am going to advocate for equity wherever I go so that is no matter where I am at, I will hope that that is something I hold up to, to carry out. I would like to teach college and actually I have looked into it a couple of years ago, but there were, people were saying all these things so I don’t know. Somebody told me I needed my PhD and somebody said I needed masters in English so I was like whatever. So I would like to teach college. I don’t know if it is going to happen. It would be great to do that while I still can pass for a student. I like to mess with their heads when I get in there and it was like, “You are our teacher?” and that’s what happened when I taught in California. It was kind of a trip sometimes. The parent and teachers night were very interesting.

**Stephen Quirke:** How old were you then?

**Khalil Edwards:** I was… that was 2004. So what was it? I was 26 maybe.

**Stephen Quirke:** Wow!

**Khalil Edwards:** Yeah, I was 30 in 2008. So my math is bad. How old was I?

**Natasha Lipai:** I think 26 years.

**Khalil Edwards:** Yeah, that was right, 26. Yeah.

**Natasha Lipai:** I can’t really think of anything else. I don’t know. Is there anything else?
Stephen Quirke: All right. I think… That was about it. It was a great, great interview.

Khalil Edwards: Oh, thank you.

Stephen Quirke: Thanks again and we really enjoyed listening to you. Do you have anyone you might be able to recommend maybe for the Capstone class that would be interested in being interviewed?

Khalil Edwards: About anything?

Stephen Quirke: Yeah. Like maybe next year or maybe next year, but think about it and if you –

Khalil Edwards: Okay.

Stephen Quirke: If you think of anyone, send us a name.

Khalil Edwards: Yeah. About, so it can be about everything?

Stephen Quirke: Just like this. Just for next year’s class.

Khalil Edwards: Yeah. I would say one person that comes to mind is my friend Maurice Evans. He’s at Cascade AIDS Project and he is also a member of PFLAG Black Chapter. So he may want somebody and tell you how that went around, but that is the first name that popped in my head.

Stephen Quirke: All right.

Natasha Lipai: Do you think your mother would be up for an interview?

Khalil Edwards: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh, and my dad.
Natasha Lipai: Okay, nice.

Stephen Quirke: So we will pass those names on to Pat and she’ll take it from there.

Khalil Edwards: Yeah, my mentor Deborah Cochran, she’d be good, too.

Stephen Quirke: Excellent. Thank you very much.

Khalil Edwards: All right, thank you! Good meeting you.

Natasha Lipai: Thank you.

Khalil Edwards: Thank you.

***END***