



Milwaukee LGBT History Project, Inc.

michael munson

michael munson is a co-founder of FORGE, a Milwaukee-based organization dedicated to moving fragmented communities beyond identity politics and forging a movement that embraces and empowers our diverse complexities.

As a teenager, michael presented as female and dated both men and women. During the late 1980s he identified as a dyke because of the term's radical, sexually liberated connotations. After a brief stay in New York, michael returned to Wisconsin and made Milwaukee his home. In the late 1980s he began to explore the social, emotional, and medical implications of transitioning from female to male. michael worked with gender therapist Gretchen Fincke of Pathways Counseling Center to access the medical and legal components of his transition. michael says that he experienced "hardly any difficulties" with transitioning, which he attributes to having a positive attitude, being easy-going, and allowing others time to adjust to his trans identity.

michael was at the forefront of the FTM (female-to-male) movement, which emerged in force in the mid-1990s. According to him, "Movements start with people who are on the edge already." Connecting with other female-born, masculine-identified people in the Midwest who were also challenging the gender binary and yearning for resources, michael and his partner organized meetings where trans people and loved ones could discuss gender and FTM issues, and in 1994 FORGE was born. During its early years FORGE met in Chicago and co-sponsored Milwaukee meetings and events with the MTF (male-to-female) group, Gemini Gender.

Two important events in Milwaukee's trans history occurred in 2007: FORGE sponsored the first national FTM/SOFFA conference to be held in the Midwest, and the City of Milwaukee banned discrimination based on gender identity and expression in private and public employment, housing, and some public accommodations. michael was centrally involved in both activities. He is most passionate about his anti-violence work, which addresses the intersections of transphobia, homophobia, racism, classism, and other forms of prejudice. "I don't consider myself a trans activist," michael says. "I do work that I am passionate about and sometimes that happens to benefit other people."