

# OUT for CHANGE

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**Lacey Williams  
Laura Maschal**

**Ages: 31, 34**

**Occupations: Non-profit staffer, Health care**

If there's a social justice movement to be helped, Lacey and Laura are there, especially when it comes to LGBT equality and immigrant rights issues. Lacey, 31, is a native of Orange City, Fla., and has lived in Charlotte since 2000. Here, she works as the youth programs director of the Latin American Coalition. In the past, she worked as the youth program coordinator for the Charlotte Coalition for Social Justice. Lacey attended school at Queens University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in history and religion. Laura, 34, is a Charlotte native. Currently, she works as a senior project manager at a healthcare/patient support services company. She attended the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, earning a bachelor's degree in English literature. The couple — they were married last year — are both members of the Charlotte Roller Girls, where Lacey serves as a coach and Laura as a skater and board member. Together, Lacey and Laura have devoted their volunteer time to variety of progressive causes, protests and demonstrations. "I think of myself as an activist," Lacey says. "I'm not a behind-closed-doors advocate. Give me a bullhorn and a magic marker any day. The community has enough advocates; it needs more rabble rousers." Laura says she speaks out as a way to combat privilege. "As a bisexual woman, I definitely have heterosexual privilege; unless I'm with my partner Lacey, I don't think that I'm perceived as LGBTQ by most people I meet," Laura says. "That's probably why I'm so happy to mention my love, to casually mention that I was with my wife the same way that straight folks do." Both say they look forward to a more progressive Charlotte. "We need to invest in our young people in an intentional way, not a transactional way," says Lacey. "We need to see our young people as an ends rather than a means. I've always been inspired by how quickly young people can unlearn biases and internalized oppression, and how quickly they can lift their voices to become activists and leaders confronting the issues that they face. They need good adult allies who can give them support, rather than acting as barriers."

**Ann Gonzales**

**Age: 29**

**Occupation: Entrepreneur**

Ann has called Charlotte here home since 2006, after moving from her native Concord. She worked as a freelance graphic and web designer before beginning her own business, Create-ster, with her business partner Alyssa Kibiloski. Together, the business partners have supported a wide range of LGBT groups, including the GayCharlotte Film Festival, RedFrog, the Charlotte Business Guild, Unity Fellowship Church and The Freedom Center for Social Justice, among others. She and Alyssa describe themselves as entrepreneurs and "advocates for start-ups, small businesses and budding non-profits." Ann adds, "Through Create-ster, whether graphic designing or web designing, I have felt absolutely honored to have taken part in helping LGBTQ Charlotte organizations and non-profits. While we are already advocates for start-ups and small businesses, enabling them to have a fighting chance to keep up with larger, established businesses, it's been great to be advocates for LGBTQ causes that are so important to us."



**Mario W. Newton**

**Age: 33**

**Occupation: Analyst**

A native of Columbia, S.C., Mario moved to Charlotte 13 years ago, where he's worked for Duke Energy for 11 years. He's a graduate of Montreat College, where he earned a bachelor's degree in business administration. He's currently pursuing his master's degree. Mario's involvement in the LGBT community is relatively new,

but he's jumped in feet-first. He served on the city host committee for the 2013 Human Rights Campaign North Carolina Gala and is a founding board member of Step Up Charlotte, a new non-profit which works to produce events and bring together diverse communities while raising money for non-profits in the Mecklenburg County. "Being someone involved in the LGBT community I look for reasons to promote, advocate, teach, and keep myself and the community positive," Mario says, noting his passion for a variety of issues. He dreams of a day when "we won't need special groups, parades or colors to make everyone feel equal" and says that everyone should be treated equally "not because it's the law, but because it's humane." At work, Mario uses his relationships to promote LGBT philanthropy and support for local LGBT groups and events. "Charlotte is definitely progressive, friendly and welcoming," he says. "Since my 13 years of living in Charlotte, I have been fortunate enough to have met colleagues, associates and friends that have welcomed me and my cause with open arms."



**Rebecca Chapin**

**Age: 30**

**Occupation: Engineer**

A native of Ronkonkoma, N.Y., Rebecca now lives in Raleigh, where she works as a hardware testing engineer. She previously worked in technical support and graphic design. She holds a bachelor's degree in fine art from the University of Hartford. In the community, she volunteers as a board member and program director

at the LGBT Center of Raleigh. Rebecca describes herself as an advocate for those with no voice "I engage the trans\* community and use what I learn to effect change within the greater Raleigh/Durham area," she says, noting her passion for the trans\* community. Thinking back on her coming out experience, Rebecca says she wants others to have more visible and accessible support systems. "I want the Raleigh/Durham area to be the most trans progressive area in the state," she says. "At the very least, create a safe welcoming space where individuals can explore the concepts of gender identity without persecution or misinformation." The current legal landscape has affected Rebecca and her work life. "Sadly in this economy and political climate, I make efforts to keep my professional and advocacy work separate," she says. "There are currently no protections in this state for gender identity and thus makes it high risk to attempt to combine the two worlds" without employment non-discrimination protections, she says.

**Micah Johnson**

**Age: 26**

**Occupation: Non-profit staffer**

Micah works as the director of school outreach and gay-straight alliance support. A native of Thompson, Iowa, Micah attended Luther College in Buffalo Center, Iowa, where he received a bachelor's degree in psychology. He earned a master's of social work at St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa. Micah also volunteers as a mentor at Northwest School of the Arts. He calls himself a "professional student advocate," saying, "For as much as I advocate for students professionally, I learn from those students, and professionals, and activists and continue to grow from knowing these beautiful people." Micah says he's been fortunate to find work that complements his own personal passions. "My passion drives my work with local students, parents, and educators," he says. "I don't think you can do this work without passion."



**O'Neale Atkinson**

**Age: 28**

**Occupation: Non-profit staffer**

Many in the community have come to know O'Neale through the LGBT Community Center of Charlotte, where he worked as operations manager for a year and a half, or from his 6-month stint as *quotes* editor in the spring of 2012. Recently, though, he's transitioned into a new role at another community group, becoming director of youth

programs at Time Out Youth. A native of Chester, S.C., O'Neale attended the University of South Carolina where he earned his master's of social work. Since college, he says, social work has been his goal and, in particular, working with the LGBT community. Prior to his work in Charlotte, O'Neale also worked with organizations that served people with disabilities, the aging community and individuals living with HIV. "Serving others and being able to be a voice against stigma and oppression are driving forces behind my passion to pursue a career in this community," he says. He says employment discrimination is a top concern of his. "We have so many talented and skilled individuals in our community who are afraid to be themselves at work or who can not find employment because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. This is a problem that we have to focus our attention on," he says. Locally, O'Neale hopes to see greater collaboration and visibility. "The LGBT community here in Charlotte is so vibrant and full of groups and organizations to be a part of," he says. "Ever since moving to Charlotte in 2011 I have been so impressed by the scope of our community. I would love to see more groups and organizations partnering to support one another and to do good in the greater Charlotte community."



**Sarah Demarest  
Kelly Durden**

**Ages: 31, 32**

**Occupations: Lawyers**

Kelly and Sarah have teamed up to create a new resource in Charlotte, offering legal services and advice to LGBT locals. Together, the two have established the LGBT Law Center, in coordination with the Freedom Center for Social Justice. Kelly, 32, is a native of Jacksonville, N.C., and attended the University of North Carolina-Wilmington where she received a bachelor's degree in English and Spanish. She is a graduate of the University of North Carolina School of Law. Sarah, 31, is a native of Portland, Maine, and attended Guilford College where she earned a bachelor's degree in justice and policy studies. She is scheduled to graduate from Charlotte School of Law this May. Kelly has five years of practice in public interest law and two years in private practice. While in school, Sarah has worked for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force as a law fellow. She's also worked at Legal Services in Charlotte and spent eight years in the financial industry before attending Charlotte School of Law. Kelly says she is most passionate about "equal rights and equal access to justice." "Discovering the inequities and inadequacies of the law in recognizing basic rights, particularly for those in the trans\* community, really inspired me to do everything in my power to both educate and empower those in the LGBT community, thereby advancing the movement as a whole," Kelly says. Like her law partner, Sarah, too, feels a passion for the transgender community. "I'm passionate about stopping discrimination against trans\* individuals and removing legal barriers that interfere with the ability of all LGBT people to work and live as productive and equal members of society," Sarah says, noting other passions such as immigration issues, racial justice and food justice. "In past work and school situations, I have been the only African-American lesbian," Kelly says. "I hope I have been able to break some of the stereotypes associated with the LGBT community just by being myself and sharing my experiences with classmates and co-workers."